SUSPENSE and

argosy

Henry Cecil

Victor Canning

C. S. Forester

William P. McGivern

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JUNE—2/6

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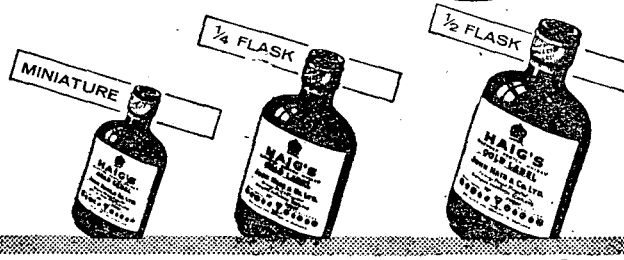

Don't be vague—ask for **Haig**

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argosy

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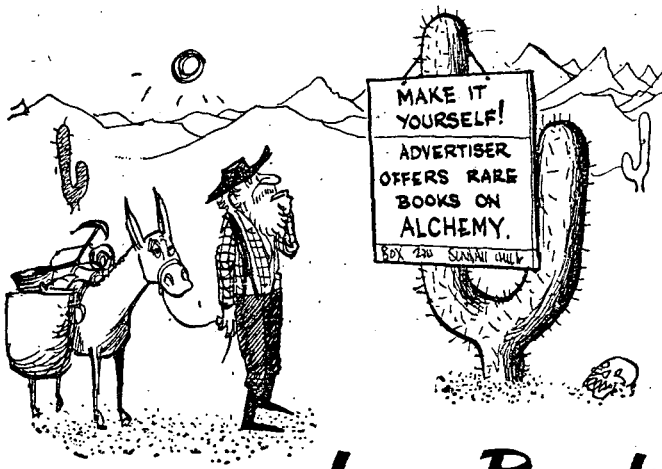

Log Book

WE read not long since that gold (along with onions and water) is one of the few commodities not yet advertised; presumably in the case of gold because the demand still exceeds the supply (though surely that can't be true of onions or water?).

This state of affairs won't last long, however, since our attention has just been drawn to an ad. in the personal column of one of the top-type Sunday papers stating that a private person wishes to dispose of rare books on alchemy. Plainly he has done the trick at last and is getting rid of his apparatus before taking off for the South Seas with a trunkful of ingots—he is probably the same lad who in *Exchange and Mart* a week earlier was seeking tenders for a pair of corsets and half a skeleton (which half not stated).

But if gold is really going to be as common as frozen peas and plastic roses in December we fear it will put the kybosh on our favourite kind of fiction . . .

" The wreaths of vapour swirled ever thicker and yet thicker about the cobweb-festooned garret as old Nicodemus stooped above his bubbling cauldron and young Humbold the apprentice watched with a fearful fascination while the hellish brew changed from black to green and took on a strange metallic glister. The alchemist turned to the boy, his eyes glowing wildly beneath their craggy brows.

" ' Gold! ' he croaked. ' *Gold!* ' . . ."

In the following chapter someone falls into the cauldron and

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young Humbold runs off with the alchemist's daughter . . .

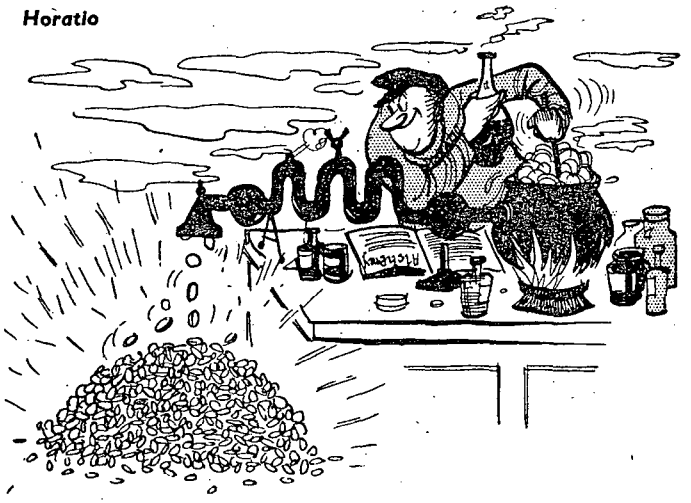
There was a very good alchemical attic in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, where the villain used to try to make gold nobles for Louis XI in the intervals of looking down between the gargoyles and thinking wicked thoughts about Esmeralda; and an even better sequence in one of Fitz-James O'Brien's strange stories in which the alchemist's daughter, realising poor old Dad was never going to make it, popped the same ingot into the cauldron time after time . . . but there was a terrible scene on stocktaking day.

With gold common as daisies, fiction is also going to lose the old-timer gazing sagely away from the campfire at the mountains behind Dead Man's Gulch and rasping, "Ar, thur's untoold wealth in them ranges, lad, did a man know whurr to dig. Ef my old bones was younger, and I hadn't used my gold-pan for frying fish-fingers, I'd be out thurr yet with the best of 'em . . ."

The old-timer has been exchanged for the discoverer of penicillin gazing at a new culture and murmuring, "Thur's mould in them thur pills." And the romance of golden guineas by the Anti-Decimal Coinage League fighting a rearguard action.

But still, up and until Argosy costs twenty-five cents British, or a quarter of a thaler, we'll bring you such romance as life has to offer—watch out next month for more adventures of young Humbold, on the run with a pair of corsets, half a skeleton, and the alchemist's daughter.

JOHN SILVER



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Near Miss

by HENRY CECIL

IN 1960 Giles Kenwood, MP, started a road safety campaign. The problem, he had said, was to prove to the public that it only required a little extra care by everyone concerned to halve the accident rate. Eventually he persuaded the Government to organise a national No-Accident Day when it was to be a point of honour with everyone not to be involved in an accident.

In due course, preceded by a concentrated campaign in the Press, on radio and television, in the churches and schools, by posters in the streets, and every known method of advertising, the great day arrived. Kenwood had himself taken a considerable part in the campaign, and the probability was that, if it succeeded, he would become the next Minister of Transport.

It was with some relief that he and his wife heard that throughout the country visibility was good and the roads were dry. He took her out in the car in the morning to do some shopping, and drove carefully, as he always did. He certainly was not going to have an accident that day. He came to some crossroads, looked right and left, saw nothing, and drove across them. As he arrived safely in the road opposite, his wife gave a little scream.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Didn't you see that cyclist?"

"What cyclist?"

"What cyclist! The one coming along the road. I thought he was bound to hit you. He would have, if he hadn't braked for all he was worth and followed you round."

Kenwood looked in his mirror and saw a cyclist following him. He was on a bright blue, semi-racing bicycle.

"I never saw any cyclist," he said. "But he was coming round here anyway."

"He wasn't, I assure you," said his wife. "He was going hard at right-angles to you. It's a miracle there wasn't an accident."

Kenwood looked again in his mirror and saw the cyclist turn

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In his moments away from the bench, Henry Cecil (pseudonym of a County Court Judge) combines his literary and professional abilities to write novels with a legal slant. His bestselling Brothers in Law, later a box-office hit, preceded Settled Out of Court. His most recent book, Not Such an Ass, explains the complications of the legal system to the layman.

round and disappear in the direction in which his wife said he had been going.

"Good God!" he said. "You were right. I never saw the man."

"I was sure you had or I'd have said something," said his wife.

"Good God!" Kenwood repeated.

"D'you think we should go back and speak to him?"

"Well, he's gone now, and there wasn't an accident."

"He may have taken your number."

"We could never find him. We can't go up to every cyclist and say, 'Did I nearly knock you down?'"

"Well, let's hope he hasn't taken your number."

"Don't keep on saying that," he said sharply. He never spoke to his wife like that. "I'm sorry, darling," he said. "I was just a bit worried for a moment. Thank heaven, he wasn't hurt. But I'd look pretty silly charged with careless driving."

"But you're never careless."

"I must have been. I think I see how it happened. I must have been unsighted by you and the parcels and the door-pillar combined. A cycle coming head on is a pretty small object, and I must have missed seeing him that way."

"Well, there you are," said his wife, "if he has got your number, that's your defence."

"It isn't a defence," said Kenwood. "If you can't see for certain that the road is clear, you've no business to cross."

"I expect he was too shaken to get your number. We were probably fifty yards away before his heart started to beat again."

"Well, if he has got it, I shall look a pretty good fool. On today of all days, too."

"If today's a success, it won't matter."

"Won't it, though! The leader of the campaign pleading guilty to careless driving!"

"But why plead guilty?"

"Because I was guilty. It'd be even worse to try to fight it."

"Well, cheer up. I don't suppose he could get the number."

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She changed the subject, but her husband was still brooding on the matter. Suppose the man had taken his number, he'd rush to the nearest police station. "I've just nearly been killed by a car," he'd say, "but I've got the number fortunately. The fellow didn't stop, and tore away."

He hadn't torn away, but anyone who had nearly been involved in such an accident would certainly think he had. And say so. The police sergeant would take the number and put an inquiry through to the council where his car was registered. Then they'd have to send a policeman to see him.

"Forgive my troubling you, sir," the policeman would say, "but I'm making inquiries about an incident at the crossroads where Bignal Road crosses Hampshire Street. A cyclist has stated . . ." And so on and so on, until finally he'd ask, "The car is registered in your name, sir. Can you tell me who was driving it at the time?"

Well, he'd have to come clean and make the best excuse he could. He'd point out, if necessary, how easy it is to become unsighted by a near object. Perhaps they wouldn't prosecute.

But how could they do otherwise? It might look bad if anyone heard about it. "Can the Attorney-General tell the House why no proceedings were taken against the honourable member for Underwood?" It was an open and shut case, once he admitted that he was there driving the car. And he'd have to. And the headlines! Oh, God!

"Which would you prefer to see, darling?" said his wife.

She had been talking about plays. He hadn't heard a word. Somehow or other he took his mind off the cyclist and discussed which theatre they should go to, but it was not easy. A moment later he was back again with the policeman on his doorstep. But would he come? Had the man taken his number? When would he know? And then a horrible thought came to him. He would have to wait fourteen days before he knew.

He was aware that a man cannot be charged with careless driving unless he's warned at the time of the offence or unless he receives a summons or a warning letter within fourteen days of the incident. Fourteen days! How could he endure fourteen days of what he'd suffered in the last minutes? Every knock at the door—would it be a policeman? Every time he came home—had a policeman called in his absence?

But perhaps the man hadn't taken his number. It's very difficult to get the number of a receding car unless you start to do so when it is very close. Eleanor may have been right. The man may have been so shaken that he didn't start to take it until too late. He was rather ashamed of the thought,

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because he couldn't help hoping that that had happened.

Fourteen days of this, he thought. Can I stand it? It'll be torture. But it's ridiculous, he told himself. You haven't broken into a bank or murdered someone. Just a slight mistake. No one hurt. And it could happen to anyone. But someone was nearly hurt. Might have been killed. That's exactly how people were killed. Because someone didn't take quite enough care.

No, he was the one person to whom this must not happen. He would be the world's laughing stock. "Just that little bit of extra care," he remembered saying. "It won't cost you anything in money. Only a second or two in time. And thousands of lives may be saved if you'll give it. I appeal to you all . . ."

Somehow or other he got through the day. Fortunately he was very much occupied, though each time he had a moment to himself his mind returned to the subject. But it was only after the House rose and he was on his way home that another thought occurred to him. Supposing the cyclist had got part of his number, say all but one letter, it might be impossible to trace him within fourteen days. In such a case it was absurd if proceedings could not take place, however quickly the police had worked. He would have to find out what the law was; but if his belief were correct, even at the end of fourteen days he would not be safe.

He reached home, chatted to his wife a little, and then they went to bed. His wife was soon asleep but, as he had feared, sleep for him was impossible. Perhaps the man wouldn't go to the police even if he had his number. No doubt he was shaken, but that would soon wear off. He hadn't been hurt. Why should he bother?

But possibly he was one of those determined people who pursue things to the end. He had been wronged, the wrongdoer did not stop; he had his number and would see that he was brought to justice. If he was that sort of person, how long would it take? Presumably the police could get the information on the telephone and, if so, they'd send down to his house pretty quickly. The next day probably. So, if they didn't come the next day or the day after, perhaps he'd be all right.

But the police were busy people and there was a lot of serious crime. A mere case of careless driving, when there was no accident, might be put aside for a few days. But they'd surely come within the first week. They knew of the fourteen day rule. That meant seven nights like this one. He couldn't stand it. He'd get some sleeping tablets and take them for a week.

But suppose the man had nearly got the number but wasn't

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quite sure. It was either IKP, JKP, or YKP and the figures were 984. They'd have to investigate all three numbers and he might come last. That would take time. Or perhaps he wasn't sure of one of the figures either. How many permutations would that make? It would vastly increase the number of possibilities. Could take well over the fortnight then. Then, of course, he might have got all the letters and digits except one. That would mean twenty-five possibilities. But, if he wasn't sure of one of the letters and one of the figures, it would mean hundreds. He couldn't take sleeping tablets for months. But he couldn't endure this strain either. And so he went through the night, occasionally sleeping and dreaming but mostly turning over and over and worrying.

"Anything the matter, darling?" asked his wife in the morning, when she saw how tired he looked. "Not still worrying about that cyclist?"

He spoke as casually as he could. "Not really. But it oughtn't to have happened. If a policeman does happen to call . . ."

"A policeman! You poor darling. You have been worrying. No policeman is going to call. You'll see. Now what time will they get the figures for yesterday?"

He'd almost forgotten what yesterday was.

"Not till late afternoon, I'm told. The late editions of the evening papers should have it in."

And they did. It had been a resounding success. Only about half the number of accidents. Less than half the average number of people killed, a third of the number injured. He was congratulated on all sides and for a short time was able to forget his anxiety.

But on the way home it started again. His wife couldn't get hold of him during the day to tell him if a policeman had called. He'd just have to wait till he got home. He'd know at once then. It would be the first thing she'd say if anything had happened.

He arrived home. His wife was upstairs.

"Hullo, darling," she called down. "Well done." She had heard the news of the success of No-Accident Day.

"Thank God!" he said to himself. "Nothing can have happened."

She came downstairs and kissed him.

"I got a shock this morning," she said a few moments later. "A policeman called."

He went white. Then it had happened. Oh God!

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She was not looking at him as she spoke, and did not realise the effect on him of what she said. "It was only about my bicycle. I'd left it in Hammer Street again."

"I think I'd like a drink," he said.

During that day he had found out that his belief about the fourteen days not being an absolutely rigid rule was right. It didn't apply if the owner of the car could not reasonably have been traced within that time. So how long had he got to wait? Weeks? Months?

And then another unpleasant thought had occurred to him. If they didn't call until after the fourteen days, it was because they had got to trace a lot of numbers. That meant that, if the police did call, he had only to say that he hadn't been anywhere near the place of the incident on the occasion in question and he would be safe. The cyclist would never be able to identify him. His car was dark in colour. Well, so were lots of cars. If he and his wife said they weren't there, nothing could happen. The policeman would apologise for troubling him and try the next number. He would be completely safe and no one but himself and his wife would ever know the truth.

It was a horrible thought. If he lasted the fourteen days he'd be safe ever after, if he were prepared to lie. He had a moment or two's struggle with the situation. But it did not take him long to make up his mind. He would have to tell the truth, whatever the consequences. He could not go through life knowing that he had lied and, almost as bad, with his wife knowing that he had done so too.

He took sleeping tablets that night and slept better. The next day he was told confidentially that in about three months' time the Minister of Transport was going to retire and he would be offered the job. Things were looking up.

After the first week he felt distinctly better. Surely the police would have called by now if the man had got his number. He stopped taking sleeping tablets. He still telephoned his wife unnecessarily during the day, just to be sure, but now he was becoming confident that he would not be greeted with bad news.

At last the fourteen days were over and he felt fairly safe. And, as the weeks went on, although he did not forget the incident, it ceased to worry him. And the thought that he would soon be a Minister of the Crown was a very pleasant one. He became a normal person again.

And then one day, when he came back from the House tired but happy, his wife said as soon as he arrived, "Giles, while I was out two men called and said they wanted to see you."

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"Two men?"

He was still not worried. If it had happened ten weeks before, he'd have gone white, as he did when his wife told him about the policeman calling about her bicycle.

"Yes, Mrs. Main said they were from Scotland Yard."

"Scotland Yard!"

He did go white.

"What did they want?"

"They didn't say, but they're coming first thing in the morning. I wonder what it is, darling? You don't think it could still be about that cyclist?"

"I don't know. I don't think so. That's surely not a Scotland Yard matter. They'd have sent a local policeman to see us."

Although he said that to his wife, he said to himself that perhaps, when numbers were difficult to trace, it was handed over to Scotland Yard. Now he'd have to wait till the morning to know. Probably it was about a burglary somewhere, or something. Or perhaps it was political and they were from the Special Branch. And yet all the time he felt it must be about the cyclist. He could see the headlines again:

MINISTER OF TRANSPORT PLEADS GUILTY TO CARELESS DRIVING

But it wouldn't be that. If he was going to be prosecuted, he couldn't accept the job. He took two sleeping tablets and slept so soundly he was actually woken up by the knock at the door.

His wife opened it and showed the two men into the sitting-room. Then she went back to the bedroom.

"It's them," she said.

He put on his dressing-gown and went to the men.

"I'm Detective Inspector Martin, sir, and this is Sergeant Doyle, from Scotland Yard."

"Yes?"

"I'm making inquiries about an incident which is said to have taken place at the crossroads Bignal Road and Hampshire Street, on 23rd February last."

God! So it had caught up with him after all.

"Yes?" he said.

"A cyclist has stated that about 11-30 a.m. on that day he very nearly collided with a dark car which came across his path and didn't stop. I don't suppose it was you by any chance, sir? Yours is one of the possible numbers."

This was it. After all these weeks of freedom. Prospective Minister of Transport!

"Yes, Inspector, it was. I never saw the man. My wife and her parcels must have obscured the view."

"Well, I'm damned," said the inspector. "Excuse me, sir,

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I apologise. But, when you've made over a hundred calls, you get to the stage when you never expect to find the man. As a matter of fact, we didn't believe there was one. But you can't take chances with murder."

Kenwood's head swam. He went white, and felt for a chair to steady himself.

"Are you all right, sir?" asked the inspector.

"But he wasn't hurt. I never touched him," said Kenwood. "I know I didn't. My wife can confirm it. She'll tell you. She saw the man all the time and thought I had too, or she'd have warned me. And afterwards we saw him cycling behind me. He was on a bright blue bicycle. Then he turned round and disappeared."

"Bright blue, did you say, sir?" said the inspector. "Well I'm— D'you mind if we sit down, sir? This has been a bit of a shock to us."

"Please do. But the man wasn't hurt, I assure you. It must have been another car which ran over him. But I didn't read anything about it in the papers. I'll call my wife."

He went straight out and brought her in.

"These are police officers who've called about the cyclist. They say he's dead—been murdered."

"Oh no, sir, forgive me. I didn't say that. I said you can't take chances with a case of murder, and capital murder at that. The man who nearly collided with you is suspected of a murder in Birmingham. He's sworn all along that he was in London at the time, but he's got no one to back him up. Then he told us he'd nearly had an accident with a car which went across his path and didn't stop. He'd got its number, but after he'd cooled down decided to do nothing about it.

"He'd written the number down on a book of matches which he'd still got, but it was so damaged when we interviewed him that we couldn't make out all the letters and figures. So we've been going through all the possible numbers just to see if there was any truth in it. A tedious process, sir. Lucky for him it was you, sir. Might have been one of those hit-and-run drivers who'd have been frightened to admit it."

"And lucky your wife's parcels stopped you seeing him," said the sergeant.

"Lucky? Why?"

"Where would his alibi have been, sir, if you hadn't nearly killed him?"

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★ ★ ★

Of a whodunnit writer: He's writing his alibiography.

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EDGAR WALLACE . .

Dear Editor, You asked me to choose my favourite story by Edgar Wallace.

When they think of my father, most people connect his name with thrillers or with plays. Some readers remember him as the author of the African stories in which Mr. Commissioner Sanders and the irrepressible Bones had their place, and some read and, possibly like me, re-read those racing stories featuring the little tipster, Educated Evans. To me, he was one of my father's best and most fully realised creations and "The Proud Horse", remains one of my favourite stories.

There is one very good reason for my choice. This tale reveals the writer very exactly as I knew him. It shows the man whose cherished relaxation was horse racing and gives the reader a glimpse of the man himself: a storyteller, as the world knew him and, as we all knew him, one of the most amusing companions possible. More than this and perhaps less expected though it was so profoundly true a part of his character, the story shows his compassionate love for children.

I do hope that you enjoy it.

Pat Wallace

EDUCATED EVANS left the Italian Club, having lost £4 18s. at a game which was known locally as "Prop and Cop." He had propped so misguidedly, and copped with such lack of brilliance, that the wonder was—as "The Miller," to whom he confided his woes, told him—that he had any trousers left. Yet Educated Evans was not an unhappy man; for that day had seen the success of his £5 Special. And on the previous Sunday "Tattenham" had said nasty things about a trainer who was reputedly an enemy to all touts and tipsters, and had expressed his views on the same in the public Press.

Sergeant Challoner walked with Evans to the end of the mews wherein the educated man had his habitation. As they stood

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The Proud Horse

talking, the keen-eyed "Miller" saw a light shining at one of the windows above a stable. "The Turners are up late," he said.

"The kid's ill," said Educated Evans shortly, and, taking leave of the detective, he made his way rapidly along the uneven roadway. He did not go direct to his own room but, climbing the opposite stairs, came to a pause on a landing very similar to his own, and knocked at the door which led to the lighted room. He knocked gently, but the door was instantly opened by a haggard-looking woman.

"How is he?" asked Educated Evans quietly; and she made way for him to enter.

The room was a little better furnished than Evans' room, but it was less airy. On a stuffy bed lay a small boy, very wan and hollow-eyed. The perspiration glistened on his white forehead, but he grinned at the sight of Evans.

"Hullo, Mr. Evans!" he piped.

"Hullo, Ernie!" said Evans, sitting down on a chair by the side of the bed.

"Been to the races, Mr. Evans?"

"No, I can't say that I have," admitted Evans.

"And I'll bet your horse didn't win," said the child, speaking with difficulty, and fixing his solemn eyes upon the bareheaded tipster.

"If you bet that you'd bet wrong, Ernie. It did win! I thought you was better or I'd have come home earlier."

Ernie was an old pal of Educated Evans. They were in the habit of holding speech together across the intervening space which separated one balcony from the other. Mrs. Turner was a widow; her husband had been killed in an accident when working for the firm that owned the stables above which she lived. They had given her a small pension and, more important at that time, had given her the two rooms rent free for life.

The woman herself did not come into the purview of Educated

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Evans, for she was not interested in the thoroughbred racehorse, nor very greatly interested in Mr. Evans. But Ernie and he went walking together, surveyed the spring glories of the park, and sailed boats upon the lake.

He went to the door with the woman.

"What did the doctor say?" he asked in a low voice.

"He says he ought to go away into the country, and it's his only chance," said the woman, with a catch in her breath. "He'll die if he stays here. The doctor's tried to get him into a convalescent home, but there's no vacancies; and I can't afford to keep him away for any time."

"Mr. Evans!"

He turned to the bed. The child had struggled up on to his elbow and was watching him with his odd, pitiful face.

"What about that prahd 'orse?"

"That what?" said Evans, puzzled.

"You told me you'd let me see a prahd 'orse."

"Oh, a proud horse," said Evans correctly, and remembered his promise.

"What do you mean by a proud horse, Ernie?" he asked.

"You know, Mr. Evans—the 'orses that 'old their 'eads up in the air, they're so prahd. There used to be two down 'ere—the undertaker's 'orses; but he took 'em away. I'd like to see a prahd 'orse. I could sit all day and look at a prahd 'orse," said the child, with queer earnestness.

"Ain't there any proud horses in the mews?" asked Evans. "What about Haggitt's?"

The child's pale lip lifted contemptuously.

"'E isn't a prahd 'orse," he said scornfully. "Why, 'e 'olds 'is 'ead down like a cow. I'd like to see a prahd 'orse, Mr. Evans—them that champs their feet on the ground."

Evans scratched his nose. "Now you come to mention it, Ernie, I'll confess. I haven't seen a proud horse for years. I think the motor cars must have knocked all the pride out of 'em."

"There are lots. The undertaker's 'orses was prahd," said the small boy.

Evans crossed over to his room, feeling uneasy in his mind. Financially, things were not going too well with him, or he would have offered without hesitation to send the child away into the country. His was the kind of nature that goes out to children, and it hurt him even to think of that queer little morsel of humanity in the stuffy bed in that hot and airless room. Once he got out in the night and looked out of the window. The light was still burning. When he did go to sleep it was to dream of proud horses, black as night, with high, arched necks and

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frothing mouths and hoofs that pawed incessantly. And in his dream they were pulling a shabby little coach. And under the driving-seat was a little white coffin.

He woke up sweating, pushed open the window. The dawn was in the sky and the air smelt sweet and good. The windows opposite were closed, hermetically sealed; the door was jammed tight and locked.

Evans lit the gas and sat down to study the day's programme published in the overnight paper, but he could not keep his mind to the possibilities of profit. Every entry was a proud horse, with an arched neck, that champed the ground.

At the particular moment when the kindly heart of Educated Evans was lacerated by the thought of suffering childhood, a proud horse was being pulled up on the Wiltshire Downs. His name was Veriti. He had cost, as a yearling at the Doncaster sales, 13,500 guineas; and he was, so Mr. Yardley, the eminent trainer, told the owner in dispassionate tones, worth exactly 13,500 marks at the present rate of exchange.

"He looks good enough," said Lord Teller, a shivering man who had been dragged out of bed to witness the wholly unsatisfactory trial in the cold hours of the morning.

"Unfortunately, my lord," said Mr. Yardley politely, "the London Cup is not a beauty show. If it was, I think Veriti would get very nearly first prize."

Being the great Yardley he could talk to one of the newest of the peerage frankly and in plain words.

"He can do it if he would do it," he said bitterly, watching the beautiful Veriti as he stepped daintily round and round the waiting circle; "and it isn't lack of courage. It's just wilfulness —super-intelligence, perhaps."

"What will you do?" said his lordship.

"I shall run him," said Yardley. "He will start a hot favourite, and when he finishes down the course knowledgeable people will look at one another meaningly, and the hoi polloi will talk about another one of Yardley's mysteries, and yet another nail will be driven into my reputation."

He walked over to the horse, smoothed its arched neck, and patted it. "You're a dirty dog, Jim," he said.

(His lordship learnt for the first time that the name under which a horse is registered is not the name by which it is known in a stable.)

"You're a mouldy old thief! What's the matter with you?"

Veriti did not wink, but Yardley, who understood the very souls of horses, thought he saw a look of amusement in his eyes.

"You'll have one chance, my lad, and that's at Alexandra

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Park. A cab-horse can win at Alexandra Park. And if you don't behave yourself on Saturday, you'll go to the stud at nine guineas, and you know what that means!"

Veriti did not raise his eyebrows, but he raised his ears as though he understood. And really the question of his fee was less important to Veriti than his popularity. For the moment he was exceedingly unpopular, but that did not worry him.

Mr. Yardley was a painstaking and thorough trainer, and it was all to his advantage that veiled Press comments and innuendoes passed him by without making the slightest impression. He was that gentleman whose practice it was to run two horses in a race and win with the outsider. It was the popular idea that these results were cleverly planned. To such a suggestion Mr. Yardley merely offered a cryptic smile and the remark that horses were not machines.

He brought Veriti out two mornings after, and gave him a gallop with the two best horses in his stable. And he was not overwhelmingly surprised when Veriti won the gallop pulling up; he was, as Mr. Lyndall would say, "a horse of moods."

"I suppose that means that you'll finish down that infernal course on Saturday," mused Mr. Yardley, looking into Veriti's eyes—and it may have been a coincidence, but Veriti nodded.

Educated Evans had made up his mind to have a great day on the Saturday, for his punters were, in the main, people who speculated their maximum on that day. He had planned a grand circularising of every name on his books with the winner of the London Cup. That he should have chosen Veriti is not remarkable, for Veriti had run second in the Chesterfield Plate at Goodwood. But somehow the zip had gone out of Evans' life that week. Morning and night, and sometimes in the middle of the day, he was to be found in the widow's room, sitting by the child, who seemed to fade before his very eyes.

Evans saw the doctor, a busy man with very little time to fuss.

"The child would be saved if you could get him away to the country and keep him there," he said to Evans, when the educated man met him at the bottom of the stairs. "I am giving this advice, well knowing that this poor woman cannot afford to send the child away. I've done my utmost to find a free convalescent home for him, but without success."

"What would it cost, doctor?"

"Three or four pounds a week," said the doctor brusquely, and Evans' heart sank, for he was very near the end of his own resources, and his livelihood was a precarious one.

"Do you know what I think, Mr. Evans?" said the mother, coming outside the door on to the landing and talking in a hushed

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voice. "I think that boy's life would be saved if he could see that kind of horse he's always talking about. It's funny how things run in your mind when you're ill. That's all Ernie wants."

Evans went into the room. The child was lying with his wasted hands beneath his cheeks, his eyes fixed on vacancy.

"Hullo, Ernie, old boy!" Evans patted his shoulder gently.

The dark eyes turned up to meet the tipster's face.

"What about that prahd 'orse?" he said weakly.

"I'm going to see what I can do about it," said Evans. "I'll be bringing one down the mews, and then I'll carry you to the window, and you can see it for yourself. Mrs. Turner, don't you think you might have your windows open a bit?"

She was shocked at the suggestion.

"That's what the doctor's always saying," she complained. "That means that Ernie will lie in a draught and catch a cold."

To Evans' discerning eye the boy was slowly sinking; and he spent the Friday afternoon, when he should have been attending to his business, in a vain search of the neighbouring mews for any horse that bore the slightest resemblance to Ernie's description. Not even the funeral horses were available, for it was a bad summer and the horses were working overtime. Evans could not help thinking—

He had to go to Alexandra Park; there was nothing else to do. The child was getting on his mind; and everlastingly that thin, whining voice intoning, "Want to see a prahd 'orse," rang in Evans' ears.

He himself saw one. In a half-hearted way he had sent Veriti to some fifty clients, and he saw Veriti finish a bad ninth.

And then a great idea was born in his mind, and he hurried out of the cheap ring along the road and into the paddock. That he got into the paddock at all without the necessary ticket was a tribute to his courage and resourcefulness.

He arrived as Veriti was being sheeted under the disapproving eye of the great Yardley; and surely Veriti was a picture of a horse. Unfortunately, they will not pay out on pictures, as Mr. Yardley had truly said.

"Excuse me, sir."

Yardley turned and saw a face which for the moment eluded him. "I know you. Who are you?" he asked, not being in the mood for polite conversation.

"You remember me, sir, I'm Educated Evans."

For a moment Yardley glared, and then a twinkle came into his eyes. "Oh, you are! I remember you, you rascal. What do you want? I've no tips for you, and I'm broke."

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"I don't want any money, sir," said Evans huskily, and oppressed by the fearful liberty he was taking. "But is there any chance of this horse coming to Bayham Mews, sir?" he blurted.

"To where?" asked the startled Yardley.

"To Bayham Mews, sir—Camden Town."

"There's a chance of his going into a cab, if that's what you mean. There's also a chance of him going into the cats' meat shop," said Yardley. "What do you mean, my friend?"

Brokenly, incoherently, Educated Evans told his story, gulping out the plaint of little Ernie.

"A proud horse? What is a proud horse? Oh, I think I know what you mean," said Yardley slowly, and turned his eyes upon Veriti.

"He's proud enough, though God knows why," he said, and chuckled in spite of himself. "Yes, I think he'd fill the bill. But you really don't imagine I should send his lordship's horse to amuse a small slum child, do you?"

"No, sir," said Evans miserably.

"Then you're a damned fool," said Yardley. "What is your address?"

Educated Evans, scarcely believing his ears, gave ample directions. At a quarter past six that evening, when he was sitting with Ernie, not daring to believe that the trainer would carry out his promise, there came a clatter of hoofs in the yard, and Evans dashed to the window.

Coming back without a word, he lifted the child in his arms and, in spite of Mrs. Turner's protests, carried him on to the landing. And there Ernie saw the proudest horse he had ever seen—a horse so proud that it refused to run with other horses, but invariably and sedately trailed in the rear.

"O-oh!" said Ernie, and his round eyes grew rounder.

Veriti never looked better. He had been stripped of his sheet, and his coat glistened in the afternoon sun.

"O-oh!" said Ernie. "Ain't 'e prahd?"

And proud he was, with his head held high and his delicate feet picking a way across the cobbled stones.

For a moment the horse held the eye of Educated Evans; then, looking past him, he saw Yardley. The great trainer came slowly towards him and mounted the stairs.

"Is this the child?" he said.

"Yes, sir," said Educated Evans.

"Looks as if a little fresh air would do him a world of good," said Yardley. "What do you think of my proud horse, laddie?"

"He *is* prahd!" said Ernie.

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"I should say he was," said the grim Yardley. "Nothing infectious about this child, is there?"

"No, sir," said the woman, to whom he spoke.

"I'll send my car for him the first thing in the morning. The wife of my head lad will look after him, if he's well enough to travel."

And so Ernie Turner went down into Wiltshire, and there was an amazing sequel. As though conscious of the compliment that had been paid to him, Veriti won the next time out, and won pulling up. He started at 100 to 7. The favourite, which finished down the course and started at 6 to 4, was also one of Yardley's. And in the paddock after the race, wherever men congregated, it was agreed unanimously that Yardley ought to be warned off.

THINK AGAIN

No need for a high I.Q. to tackle these teasers—but turn to page 97 for the lowdown if you're floored

1. *You have forgotten your driver's licence, ignored red traffic lights, a halt sign, and, finally, disregarded a one-way traffic sign by travelling in the opposite direction, all to the full knowledge of the most honest policeman in town. Yet he does not give you a summons. Why?*

2. *If you were a personnel manager, which of two applications—to be decided on the applicant's strength in foreign languages—would you take into further consideration: one claiming a knowledge of German, Dutch, French, and Urdu, or one claiming German, Dutch, Brazilian, Greek, and Chinese?*

3. *Someone from the quiz age promised a pound to someone else for every question he could not answer, on condition that the second person put up ten shillings for every question that stumped him. These terms agreed upon, and both having answered two sets of three questions, they settled their score, and both came out even. How did the quizlings manage this?*

4. *You have stayed for part of two years in a hotel and during your stay have eaten only at this hotel. On leaving, you are charged only for room and breakfast, but you do not question the bill. Why?*

5. *A twenty-five-yard-long pipe is just wide enough for one person to crawl through it. In it lies a cable. Two workmen, checking up on the cable, crawl into the pipe from opposite ends, and each leaves the pipe at the other end. Is this possible?*

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Language

Amo, amas, I love a lass

JOHN O'KEEFE

Do not think it audacious
When Frenchmen embracious;
There is no economy
In their bonhomie.

I. KENVYN EVANS, *National Types*

Anglo-Saxon Angle

The English have no soul; they have the understatement instead.

If a continental youth wants to declare his love to a girl, he kneels down, tells her that she is the sweetest, the most charming and ravishing person in the world, that she has *something* in her, something peculiar and individual which only a few hundred thousand other women have and that he would be unable to live one more minute without her. Often, to give a little more emphasis to the statement, he shoots himself on the spot. This is a normal, week-day declaration of love in the more temperamental continental countries. In England the boy pats his adored one on the back and says softly: "I don't object to you, you know." If he is quite mad with passion, he may add: "I rather fancy you, in fact."

If he wants to marry a girl, he says:
"I say . . . would you? . . ."
If he wants to make an indecent proposal:
"I say . . . what about . . ."

GEORGE MIKES, *How to be an Alien*

The first was from France, à-la-mode de Paris,
All fashion, all feather, bien Monsieur poudrie;
He bow'd, he took snuff, cut a caper, and then
He bow'd, cut a caper, and took snuff again.

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of LOVE

A Dutchman advanced,—when the lady he saw,
He dropp'd down his pipe, and he bluster'd out—Yaw;
With hands hid in pocket, and unpolish'd leer,
As frogs sing in courtship, so croak'd out Mynheer.

A neat English sailor in holiday trim,
Who had long loved the lass, and the lass had loved him,
He alongside her fell, and he grappled on board,
She struck the first broadside of kisses he pour'd;
Then he tow'd her to church, and as to the rest,
What afterwards follow'd is easily guess'd.

ANON

French Word For It

"Who are you?" she gasped hoarsely.

"I am the Sheik Ahmed Ben Hassan."

The name conveyed nothing. She had never heard it before. She had spoken without thinking in French, and in French he replied to her.

"Why have you brought me here?" she asked, fighting down the fear that was growing more terrible every moment.

He repeated her words with a slow smile. "Why have I brought you here? *Bon Dieu!* Are you not woman enough to know?"

She shrank back further, a wave of colour rushing into her face that receded immediately, leaving her whiter than she had been before. Her eyes fell under the kindling flame in his.

"I don't know what you mean," she whispered faintly, with shaking lips.

"I think you do." He laughed softly, and his laugh frightened her more than anything he had said. He came towards her, and although she was swaying on her feet, desperately she tried to evade him, but with a quick movement he caught her in his arms.

E. M. HULL, *The Sheik*

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Gaul and Wormwood

Not having been accustomed to the appearance or society of persons of the French nation, the rustic inhabitants of Clavering were not so favourably impressed by Monsieur Alcide's manner and appearance, as that gentleman might have desired that they should be . . .

He walked then down the street, grinning and ogling every woman he met with glances, which he meant should kill them outright, and peered over the railings, and in at the windows, where females were, in the tranquil summer evening. But Betsy, Mrs. Pybus's maid, shrank back with a "Lor' bless us!" as Alcide ogled her over the laurel bush; the Misses Baker, and their mamma, stared with wonder; and presently a crowd began to follow the interesting foreigner, of ragged urchins and children, who left their dirt-pies in the street to pursue him.

W. M. THACKERAY, *Pendennis*

Irish Woo

The turban'd Turk who scorns the world,
May strut about with his whiskers curled,
Keep a hundred wives under lock and key
For nobody else but himself to see;
Yet long may he pray with his Alcoran
Before he can love like an Irishman.

The gay Monsieur, a slave no more,
The solemn Don, the soft Signor,
The Dutch Mynheer, so full of pride,
The Russian, Prussian, Swede beside—
They all may do whate'er they can,
But they'll never love like an Irishman.

COLLINS, *None Can Love Like An Irishman*

Latin Love

He renewed his offer of marriage on an average once in three months, but in such a way as to afford no excuse for an outbreak of temperament on either side. One First of April, the question had arrived from Paris in a single Latin sentence, starting off dispiritedly, "Num . . .?"—a particle which notoriously "expects the answer No." Harriet, rummaging the Grammar book for "polite negatives," replied, still more briefly, "Benigne."

DOROTHY L. SAYERS, *Gaudy Night*

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TURN OF THE TIDE

He settled down to wait, clenching his hand on the cord in his pocket

BY C. S. FORESTER

"WHAT always beats them in the end," said Dr. Matthews, "is how to dispose of the body. But, of course, you know that as well as I do."

"Yes," said Slade. He had, in fact, been devoting far more thought to what Dr. Matthews believed to be this accidental subject of conversation than Dr. Matthews could ever guess.

"As a matter of fact," went on Dr. Matthews, warming to the subject to which Slade had so tactfully led him, "it's a terribly knotty problem. It's so difficult, in fact, that I always wonder why anyone is fool enough to commit murder."

All very well for you, thought Slade, but he did not allow his thoughts to alter his expression. You smug, selfsatisfied old ass! You don't know the sort of difficulties a man can be up against.

"I've often thought the same," he said.

"Yes," went on Dr. Matthews, "it's the body that does it, every time. To use poison calls for special facilities, which are good enough to hang you as soon as suspicion is roused. And that suspicion—well, of course, part of my job is to detect poisoning. I don't think anyone can get away with it nowadays, even with the most dunderheaded general practitioner."

"I quite agree with you," said Slade. He had no intention of using poison.

"Well," went on Dr. Matthews, developing his logical argument, "if you rule out poison, you rule out the chance of getting the body disposed of under the impression that the victim died a natural death. The only other way, if a man cares to stand the racket of having the body to give evidence against him, is to fake things to look like suicide. But you know, and I know, that it just can't be done.

"The mere fact of suicide calls for a close examination, and no one has ever been able to fix things so well as to get away

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with it. You're a lawyer. You've probably read a lot of reports on trials where the murderer has tried it on. And you know what's happened to them."

"Yes," said Slade.

He certainly had given a great deal of consideration to the matter. It was only after long thought that he had, finally, put aside the notion of disposing of young Spalding and concealing his guilt by a sham suicide.

"That brings us to where we started, then," said Dr. Matthews. "The only other thing left is to try to conceal the body. And that's more difficult still."

"Yes," said Slade. But he had a perfect plan for disposing of the body.

"A human body," said Dr. Matthews, "is a most difficult thing to get rid of. That chap Oscar Wilde, in that book of his—*Dorian Gray*, isn't it?—gets rid of one by the use of chemicals. Well, I'm a chemist as well as a doctor, and I wouldn't like the job."

"No?" said Slade politely.

Dr. Matthews was not nearly as clever a man as himself, he thought.

"There's altogether too much of it," said Dr. Matthews. "It's heavy, and it's bulky, and it's bound to undergo corruption. Think of all those poor devils who've tried it. You can't hide the thing, try as you will."

Can't I! That's all you know, thought Slade, but aloud he said, "You're quite right. I've never thought about it before."

"Of course you haven't," agreed Dr. Matthews. "Sensible people don't, unless it's an incident of their profession, as in my case.

"And yet, you know," he went on meditatively, "there's one decided advantage about getting rid of the body altogether. You're much safer, then. It's a point which ought to interest you, as a lawyer, more than me. It's rather an obscure point of law, but I fancy there are very definite rulings on it. You know what I'm referring to?"

"No, I don't," said Slade, genuinely puzzled.

"You can't have a trial for murder unless you can prove there's a victim," said Dr. Matthews. "There's got to be a corpus delicti, as you lawyers say in your horrible dog-Latin. A corpse, in other words, even if it's only a bit of one, like that which hanged Crippen. No corpse, no trial. I think that's good law, isn't it?"

"By jove, you're right!" said Slade. "I wonder why that hadn't occurred to me before?"

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No sooner were the words out of his mouth than he regretted having said them. He did his best to make his face immobile again; he was afraid lest his expression might have hinted at his pleasure in discovering another very reassuring factor in this problem of killing young Spalding. But Dr. Matthews had noticed nothing.

"Well, as I said, people only think about these things if they're incidental to their profession," he said. "And, all the same, it's only a theoretical piece of law. The entire destruction of a body is practically impossible. But I suppose if a man could achieve it he would be all right. However strong the suspicion was against him, the police couldn't get him without a corpse. There might be a story in that, Slade, if you or I were writers."

"Yes," assented Slade, and laughed harshly.

There never would be any story about the killing of young Spalding, the insolent pup.

"Well," said Dr. Matthews, "we've had a pretty gruesome conversation, haven't we? And I seem to have done all the talking, somehow. That's the result I suppose, Slade, of the very excellent dinner you gave me. I'd better push off now. Not that the weather is very inviting."

Nor was it. As Slade saw Dr. Matthews into his car, the rain was driving down in a real winter storm, and there was a bitter wind blowing.

"Shouldn't be surprised if this turned to snow before morning," were Dr. Matthews' last words before he drove off.

Slade was glad it was such a tempestuous night. It meant that, more certainly than ever, there would be no one out in the lanes, no one out on the sands when he disposed of young Spalding's body.

Back in his drawing-room Slade looked at the clock. There was still an hour to spare; he could spend it making sure that his plans were all correct.

He looked up the tide tables. Yes, that was right enough. Spring tides. The lowest of low water on the sands. There was not so much luck about that. Young Spalding came back on the midnight train every Wednesday night, and it was not surprising that, sooner or later, the Wednesday night would coincide with a spring tide. But it was lucky that this particular Wednesday night should be one of tempest; luckier still that low water should be at one-thirty, the best time for him.

He opened the drawing-room door and listened carefully. He could not hear a sound. Mrs. Dumbleton, his housekeeper,

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must have been in bed some time now. She was as deaf as a post, anyway, and would not hear his departure. Nor his return, when Spalding had been killed and disposed of.

The hands of the clock seemed to be moving very fast. He must make sure everything was correct. The plough chain and the other iron weights were already in the back seat of the car; he had put them there before old Matthews arrived to dine. He slipped on his overcoat.

From his desk, Slade took a curious little bit of apparatus: eighteen inches of string cord, tied at each end to a six-inch length of wood so as to make a ring. He made a last close examination to see that the knots were quite firm, and then he put it in his pocket; as he did so, he ran through, in his mind, the words—he knew them by heart—of the passage in the book about the thugs of India, describing the method of strangulation employed by them.

He could think quite coldly about all this. Young Spalding was a pestilent busybody. A word from him, now, could bring ruin upon Slade, could send him to prison, could have him struck off the rolls.

Slade thought of other defaulting solicitors he had heard of, even one or two with whom he had come into contact professionally. He remembered his brother-solicitors' remarks about them, pitying or contemptuous. He thought of having to beg on his release from prison, of cold and misery and starvation. The shudder which shook him was succeeded by a hot wave of resentment. Never, never, would he endure it.

What right had young Spalding, who had barely been qualified two years, to condemn a greyhaired man twenty years his senior to such a fate? If nothing but death would stop him, then he deserved to die. He clenched his hand on the cord in his pocket.

A glance at the clock told him he had better be moving. He turned out the lights and tiptoed out of the house, shutting the door quietly. The bitter wind flung icy rain into his face, but he did not notice it.

He pushed the car out of the garage by hand and, contrary to his wont, he locked the garage doors as a precaution against the infinitesimal chance that, on a night like this, someone should notice that his car was out.

He drove cautiously down the road. Of course, there was not a soul about in a quiet place like this. The few street-lamps were already extinguished.

There were lights in the station as he drove over the bridge, they were awaiting there the arrival of the twelve-thirty train. Spalding would be on that. Every Wednesday he went over

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to his subsidiary office, sixty miles away. Slade turned into the lane a quarter of a mile beyond the station, and then reversed his car so that it pointed towards the road. He put out the side-lights, and settled himself to wait; his hand fumbled with the cord in his pocket.

The train was a little late. Slade had been waiting a quarter of an hour when he saw the lights of the train emerge from the cutting and come to a standstill in the station. So wild was the night that he could hear nothing of it. Then the train moved slowly out again.

As soon as it was gone, the lights in the station began to go out, one by one; Hobson, the porter, was making ready to go home, his turn of duty completed.

Next, Slade's straining ears heard footsteps.

Young Spalding was striding down the road. With his head bent before the storm, he did not notice the dark mass of the motor-car in the lane, and he walked past it.

Slade counted up to two hundred slowly, and then he switched on his lights, started the engine, and drove the car out into the road in pursuit. He saw Spalding in the light of the headlamps, and drew up alongside.

"Is that Spalding?" he said, striving to make the tone of his voice as natural as possible. "I'd better give you a lift, old man, hadn't I?"

"Thanks very much," said Spalding. "This isn't the sort of night to walk two miles in." He climbed in and shut the door. No one had seen. No one would know. Slade let his clutch out, drove slowly down the road.

"Bit of luck, seeing you," he said. "I was on my way home from bridge at Mrs. Clay's when I saw the train come in and remembered it was Wednesday and you'd be walking home. So I thought I'd turn a bit out of my way to take you along."

"Very good of you, I'm sure," said Spalding.

"As a matter of fact," said Slade, speaking slowly and driving slowly, "it wasn't altogether disinterested. I wanted to talk business to you, as it happened."

"Rather an odd time to talk business," said Spalding. "Can't it wait till tomorrow?"

"No, it cannot," said Slade, "it's about the Lady Vere trust."

"Oh yes. I wrote to remind you last week that you had to make delivery."

"Yes, you did. And I told you long before that that it would be inconvenient, with Hammond abroad."

"I don't see that," said Spalding. "I don't see that Hammond's got anything to do with it. Why can't you just hand

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over and have done with it? I can't do anything to straighten things up until you do."

"As I said, it would be inconvenient."

Slade brought the car to a standstill at the side of the road.

"Look here, Spalding," he said desperately, "I've never asked a favour of you before. But now I ask you, as a favour, to forgo delivery for a bit. Just for three months, Spalding."

But Slade had small hope that his request would be granted. So little hope, in fact, that he brought his left hand out of his pocket holding the piece of wood, with the loop of cord dangling from its ends. He put his arm round the back of Spalding's seat.

"No, I can't, really I can't," said Spalding. "I've got my duty to my clients to consider. I'm sorry to insist, but you're quite well aware of what my duty is."

"Yes," Slade said, "but I beg you to wait. I implore you to wait, Spalding. There! Perhaps you can guess why now."

"I see," said Spalding, after a long pause.

"I only want three months," pressed Slade. "Just three months. I can get straight again in three months."

Spalding had known other men who had had the same belief in their ability to get straight in three months. It was unfortunate for Slade—and for Spalding—that Slade had used those words. Spalding hardened his heart.

"No," he said. "I can't promise anything like that. I don't think it's any use continuing this discussion. Perhaps I'd better walk home from here."

He put his hand to the latch of the door, and as he did so Slade jerked the loop of cord over his head. A single turn of Slade's wrist—a thin, bony, old man's wrist, but as strong as steel in that wild moment—tightened the cord about Spalding's throat.

Slade swung round in his seat, getting both hands to the piece of wood, twisting madly. His breath hissed between his teeth with the effort, but Spalding never drew breath at all. He lost consciousness long before he was dead. Only Slade's grip of the cord round his throat prevented the dead body from falling forward, doubled up. Nobody had seen, nobody would know. And what that book had stated about the method of assassination practised by thugs was perfectly correct.

Slade had gained now the time in which he could get his affairs in order. With all the promise of his current speculations, with all his financial ability, he would be able to recoup himself for his past losses. It only remained to dispose of Spalding's body, and he had planned to do that very satisfactorily. Just for a moment Slade felt as if all this were only some heated

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dream, some nightmare, but then he came back to reality and went on with the plan he had in mind.

He pulled the dead man's knees forward so that the corpse lay back in the seat, against the side of the car. He put the car in gear, let in his clutch, and drove rapidly down the road—much faster than when he had been arguing with Spalding. Low water was in three-quarters of an hour's time, and the sands were ten miles away.

Slade drove fast through the wild night. There was not a soul about in those lonely lanes. He knew the way by heart, for he had driven repeatedly over that route recently in order to memorise it.

The car bumped down the last bit of lane, and Slade drew up on the edge of the sands.

It was pitch dark, and the bitter wind was howling about him under the black sky. Despite the noise of the wind, he could hear the surf breaking far away, two miles away, across the level sands. He climbed out of the driver's seat and walked round to the other door. When he opened it the dead man fell sideways into his arms.

With an effort Slade held him up while he groped into the back of the car for the plough chain and the iron weights. He crammed the weights into the dead man's pockets, and he wound the chain round the dead man's body, tucking in the ends to make it all secure. With that mass of iron to hold it down, the body would never be found again when dropped into the sea at the lowest ebb of the spring tide.

Slade tried now to lift the body in his arms, to carry it over the sands. He reeled and strained, but he was not strong enough —Slade was a man of slight figure and past his prime. The sweat on his forehead was icy in the cold wind.

For a second, doubt overwhelmed him, lest all his plans should fail for want of bodily strength. But he forced himself into thinking clearly—forced his frail body into obeying the vehement commands of his brain.

He turned round, still holding the dead man upright. Stooping, he got the heavy burden on his shoulders. He drew the arms round his neck, and with a convulsive effort he got the legs up round his hips. The dead man now rode him pick-a-back. Bending nearly double, he was able to carry the heavy weight in that fashion, the arms tight round his neck, the legs tight round his waist.

He set off, staggering down the imperceptible slope of the sands towards the sound of the surf. The sands were soft beneath his feet. It was because of this softness that he had not driven

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the car down to the water's edge. He could afford to take no chances of being embogged.

The icy wind shrieked round him all that long way. The tide was nearly two miles out. That was why Slade had chosen this place. In the depth of winter no one would go out to the water's edge at low tide for months to come.

He staggered on over the sands, clasping the limbs of the body close about him. Desperately he forced himself forward, not stopping to rest, for he only had time now to reach the water's edge before the flow began. He went on and on, driving his exhausted body with fierce urgings from his frightened brain.

Then, at last, he saw it: a line of white in the darkness which indicated the water's edge. Farther out, the waves were breaking in an inferno of noise. Here, the fragments of the rollers were only just sufficient to move the surface a little.

He was going to make quite sure of things. Steadying himself, he stepped into the water, wading in farther and farther so as to be able to drop the body into comparatively deep water. He held to his resolve, staggering through the icy water, knee deep, thigh deep, until it was nearly at his waist. This was far enough. He stopped, gasping in the darkness.

He leaned over to one side—to roll the body off his back. It did not move. He pulled at its arms. They were obstinate. He could not loosen them. He shook himself wildly. He tore at the legs round his waist. Still the thing clung to him. Wild with panic and fear, he flung himself about in a mad effort to rid himself of the burden. It clung on as though it were alive. He could not break its grip, no matter how hard he tried.

Then another breaker came in. It splashed about him, wetting him far above his waist. The tide had begun to turn now and the tide on those sands comes in like a racehorse.

He made another effort to cast off the load, and when it still held him fast he lost his nerve and tried to struggle out of the sea. But it was too much for his exhausted body. The weight of the corpse and of the iron with which it was loaded overbore him. He fell.

He struggled up again in the foam-streaked, dark sea, staggered a few steps, fell again—and did not rise. The dead man's arms were round his neck, throttling him, strangling him. Rigor mortis had set in and Spalding's muscles had refused to relax.

★ ★ ★

A gunman walked up to a cinema cashier, stuck a gun in her face, and growled: "The picture was horrible—give me everyone's money back."

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THE FAR FIERCE REACHES OF THE BOOLIWONGA

By M. ARKLEY CARTER

"NO," Harry said. "Absolutely not, old girl."

"But why not?" I said. "It fits in beautifully."

Harry leaned back against his deckchair and moved his head back and forth in an extremely irritating way. The sun glinted off his dark glasses as if deliberately to distract me. "No, Alice," he said again in that uninflected voice which carries more emphasis than an ordinary person's shout.

"Harry," I said, "you're being perfectly horrible about this. *Carapice* is a lovely word and you're simply suffering from jealousy." I fluttered my palm-fan rapidly in front of my face, which I knew was redder than even the sticky heat would account for.

"Won't do." Harry pulled his pipe out of his mouth and started to tamp it in that slow, deliberate way which he knows drives me mad, particularly when we are playing "Scrabble." I have difficulty concentrating when it's so hot.

"Why?" I demanded angrily.

"Eight letters." He stuck his pipe in his mouth again and lit it with fast, short, triumphant, almost leering puffs. Well, it had been worth a try, and although I loathe being caught—why hadn't he said something when I pulled that one little extra letter out of the pile?—it was quite cruel of him, playing cat-and-mouse with me this way. At least I take defeat gracefully. I took back the letters and set out the word *price* instead.

"Anyway it's spelt with an a," Harry said.

"Price?"

"Carapace." He smugly sorted over his own letters and came up with *equalize*, right through two triple-word scores. "That'll

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be one hundred and sixty-eight points," he murmured, jotting it down on the score-pad.

"Harry," I said firmly, "*carapice* is spelt with an i."

"An a," he said pleasantly. "Your turn."

"Harry, these arguments over spelling are driving me to distraction. How *could* you have forgotten to pack that dictionary?"

"You forgot."

"*One hundred and sixty-eight points!*" I screamed, just noticing. From the jungle a parrot screamed back, mocking.

"How did you—?"

There was a commotion from around upriver where Coubo, our black cook, and one of the boys had gone to hunt for lizards. Harry slapped his feet down on the deck and stood up.

"Damn those blasted alligators," he muttered.

"Oh dear," I said, "I hope it isn't Coubo. It's taken so long to teach that boy how to make a decent omelet."

Harry buckled on his revolver and whistled for two of the other boys, who were lolling on the bank playing one of their endless idiotic pebble games. They nipped out with the canoe. Harry dropped over and in lightly as a panther—for a man in his late fifties, Harry is wonderfully agile—and the three of them skimmed out of the cove and were rounding into the main current before I'd drawn a deep breath.

I went aft into the scorching little cabin and, I must admit, loosened my girdle a little. While for years we have firmly believed in keeping up appearances no matter where we are—niceties can disintegrate so quickly on expeditions, particularly in the tropics—I do think that a woman of fifty-six, especially if she is a wee bit plump, can be allowed an occasional discreet lapse. Besides, I had been against the Guianas, particularly in April when things are even hotter and soggier than can be believed; but the people at the Explorers' Club had been so impressed when Harry had mentioned that he was thinking of making a try for the headwaters of the Booliwonga—Haakon had tried it last year but had bogged down at some pygmy village and barely escaped with his head—I simply hadn't the heart to say no to Harry.

There were shots from upriver.

I lay down on my bunk and before I had had ten full minutes of comfort I heard their paddles as they sped back into the cove. By the time I had got up on deck again, Harry was just clambering on board. He looked disturbed.

"Oh dear, I suppose it was Coubo," I sighed. To cheer him up, I said, "Well, we'll have alligator ragout. *I'll* make it, dear.

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Do you suppose one of the other boys could be taught to cook? We can't send back for anyone else just now, you know."

Coubo's head appeared over the gunwales, his black shoulders sweating magnificently as he hauled away at something in the canoe.

"Oh good!" I cried. "It *wasn't* Coubo . . . Tell him not to bring that filthy alligator on deck, Harry! For heavens' sake, have him skin it on shore!"

"Stop babbling, Alice," Harry said wearily. "Bad news. Bloody nuisance." He leaned over and hauled, and Coubo pushed, and up over the side came a very limp white man.

They tumbled him over on to the deck and pulled him under the shade of the thatch. He lay face up next to the card-table, breathing in long shuddering gasps.

The other canoe skimmed alongside and the boys tossed up to Harry a battered and obviously heavy backpack.

The man on deck groaned.

"Heavens, he's in terrible shape," I cried. "I'll get some fresh water."

I stopped short at the look on Harry's face. He glanced round at Coubo, who was grinning amiably over the rail, his white teeth with their filed points sharp like darts in his black face. Harry barked something and Coubo disappeared and shot the canoe for shore with a great show of diligence.

"Never mind," Harry said resignedly, turning back to me. "Get the chap some water, I suppose."

"It was hell," the young man muttered, sipping at his tea. He was still shaking so badly he had to hold the cup with both hands. "Ohellhellhell."

He was quite a young man; even with that beard and his haggard eyes he didn't appear to be much over twenty-five. He looked terrible. His khaki shirt was in shreds, stained stiff with sweat and in a few places with blood; his breeches were torn and hung limply over his puttees, which dangled round his calves, held by two remaining buckles.

I don't know how long ago he had lost his sun-helmet, but his face was burnt raw. I had to fight back a motherly impulse to smooth his hair and pat his cheek, but his terrible eyes looked out like those of an animal who has been badly hurt and should not yet be touched.

"Tell us about it," I urged. "Perhaps if you can talk it out—"

He continued to moan and make pathetic little forays towards the teacup, his lips missing the rim by inches.

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"Where did you find him, Harry?" I asked, turning to my husband, who was leaning against the post of the thatched deck-shelter, tamping his pipe in what appeared to be deep concentration.

"He was floating down the river on a log. Had this pack strapped to his back. Gun too, of course. Took a pot-shot at the boys. Missed, fortunately. When I got there he was still in the middle of the river straddling his log and waving the gun and yelling. When he saw me he collapsed."

"Then he must have come from upriver?" Harry nodded. "I wonder how far upriver," I murmured. Harry shot me a glance.

"Ohellhellhell," the young man bubbled afresh through his tea, which he had finally managed to reach. "The river. The great grey-green, greasy Limpopo River—" Dripping, he lifted his head and regarded the sky blankly. "All—all—"

"All set about with fever-trees," I prompted.

Slowly he turned his head and stared at me wonderingly, as if he had just noticed me. Presently he said, "You look very much like my Aunt Sophia."

"How nice," I said cheerfully, noting that his trembling had abated somewhat. I hitched my chair a little closer and lifted the teapot invitingly. "A little more?"

"I have died and gone to heaven," he muttered.

I filled his cup and handed it to him and sat back and chatted cosily while he drank it. I have found that a little politeness and normality at times like these is the best thing to pull people through a crisis.

He drained the cup, smiled boyishly at me, and at once was asleep, sitting bolt upright in his chair. I tiptoed over and smoothed his hair very gently and let him be. I went over to Harry, who had turned and was leaning on the rail, staring over the water into the jungle. "He seems a well-bred young man," I whispered. "I wonder what happened to him."

"I wonder how far upriver he got," Harry muttered. I leaned on the rail next to him and we were silent.

It was already dark when he awoke. Coubo and the boys were making the usual racket on shore over dinner preparations. They were putting cubes of lizard-meat on skewers, alternating with squares of a kind of native pepper and onions, and large button mushrooms from cans.

It had taken me simply days to teach Coubo how to fix a passable shish kebab. All over the world, even in the remotest spots, Harry and I have made a point of dining well. It keeps up morale. If one can get through those first frustrating weeks of

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training a cook, patience can be rewarding. You can see why we'd hate to lose Coubo.

We were having our usual Martini, sitting on deck enjoying the relative cool of the dark, watching the boys like black imps darting before the red fire which was reflected in the smooth water washing gently between the boat and the bank.

The young man leapt suddenly to his feet, upsetting his chair. "Where am I?" he yelled.

"It's quite all right," I said, getting up to face him. I struck a match and lit the lantern hanging from the thatch. "See? You've had a nice rest."

"Where's my pack?" he cried. He began leaping around the deck. "Did you get my pack? If I've lost it—"

"It's right here," I said. "It's quite safe. Calm yourself and join us in a Martini."

"Oh, thank God," he breathed, at the sight of his pack. "If I'd lost it now, those photos, poor Swensen's—a Martini, did you say? I'd be delighted . . .

"It's cold," he whispered reverently. "This Martini is ice-cold. I simply don't believe it."

"We have special vacuum-flasks we designed ourselves," I said, pleased. "That Martini was mixed in Rio three weeks ago."

"Ten," Harry said sharply, from the shadows.

"Ten? Oh—oh, my word, yes! Did I say three weeks? How could I have made a mistake like that? Ten weeks ago. Good heavens, one loses all track of time in the tropics!" I could feel the pressure of Harry's scowl. I would have to be much more careful.

The young man shuddered. "How well I know! Ohell-hellhell—" He broke off and finished his Martini in one swallow. Harry poured him another. After he'd finished half of it he sat back. "Say, this is terrible of me. I haven't even thanked you for saving my life. Good lord, if you hadn't come along when you did—I say, I don't even know your names! I haven't even introduced myself." He stood up and leaned towards Harry, holding out his hand. "I'm Anthony Brawnleigh," he said, grinning boyishly. "To whom do I owe this incredible debt?"

Harry half rose. "Briggs-Thrugg, Harry."

Brawnleigh froze. "Not *Sir* Harry Briggs-Thrugg? Not *the* Sir Harry Briggs-Thrugg who last year discovered the Zambi headwaters? And the year before that penetrated deep into the mysterious Serra dos Apiacás, the first white man to observe the exotic Qxitac rites?"

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Harry nodded. Young Brawnleigh grappled with Harry's hand in a fever of enthusiasm. "My word, sir, this *is* an honour! Rescued by the great Briggs-Thrugg! Oh, wait till the fellows at the Foundation hear of this!"

Harry loathes adulation. To rescue him, I said to Brawnleigh, "Foundation? Which Foundation would that be?"

He released Harry's hand and turned to me. "The University Foundation of Anthropology and Allied Arts," he said. "I am a junior member. They sponsored this—" he slumped back into his camp-chair— "this ill-fated expedition of ours."

"Expedition?" Harry said.

"Our plan was to penetrate the upper reaches of the Booliwonga and try to take photos of the fabled pygmy headhunters said to inhabit that area." A shudder passed through him and he inadvertently snapped the stem of his glass. "Sorry," he said dismally. "Everything I do lately seems to go wrong . . . The headhunters. They're there, all right."

He got up like a man weary of fighting a nightmare from which he cannot awaken, and went over to his pack. Opening it, he drew out a small object wrapped in a T-shirt. "Poor Swensen," he mourned. "All that remains of—"

"Never mind," I interrupted hastily. "Just—just put it back, there's a nice boy."

He replaced it in the pack, gently laying it on top as if setting down a sleeping baby. Crouching there over it, he put his face in his hands. "A failure," he muttered. "A terrible failure. Just—Swensen's head and the photos."

"Photos?" Harry said.

"We got some fairly decent movies of the tribe. They let us take rolls of film that first day, before they got—ah—unpleasant. I presume we unwittingly broke one of their customs or taboos."

Wearily he got to his feet and went over to slump into his chair. "Swensen didn't get away. I'd taken a couple of the boys up the mountain peak that lies behind the village; I wanted to survey the area for our records. When I got back at nightfall there was a long pole set into the ground just outside the village with—" he almost broke down as he gestured towards the pack— "with *this* placed on top. My boys panicked and made for the river; they were shot down by darts. I escaped towards the jungle, and long after midnight when things were quiet I crawled back, grabbed Swensen's—er, this. I had to take something of him back for a decent, er—anyway, I slithered like a snake an inch at a time through the dark with this pack on my back, down to the river's edge and through the mud into the water.

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" Our canoes had disappeared. I swam most of the night and when daylight came found a log. I floated down the river on that log, hiding in the jungle during the day, for what seems like weeks—I don't know how long it was, you lose track of time . . . I must have been half mad when you found me, all I could think of was saving the pack—"

He could go no further. He just sat, staring at his hands, as if final exhaustion had overtaken him.

There was a hail from the bank, which meant that dinner was ready. Coubo nipped out with the canoe and trays of steaming food. Brawnleigh stirred and seemed to come to life. He rose to help me clear the card-table.

" Great scott," he murmured, eyeing the " Scrabble " game.

" Just sweep them into the box," I said. " Harry and I were playing when you— Just a minute! Can you by any chance tell me how *carapice* is spelt? "

" With three a's," he said promptly.

" Ho! " from Harry.

" Are you sure? " I said crossly.

" Very. As a matter of fact, I'm a wizard speller." With a show of boyish modesty he added, " I read English at the University . . . I wish I'd carried on with it," he said in depressed tones, " instead of getting interested in anthropology."

I was frowning at the board. " Harry, how did you get one hundred and sixty-eight points? "

" Let's eat," Harry said.

" Just a minute! " I pointed to *equalize*. " Why, that word has eight letters! *Eight!* Why, Harry! "

Harry swept the game into the box. " Never mind, Alice," he muttered.

I was so indignant that I could barely bring myself to be civil during dinner. Harry and Brawnleigh did most of the talking.

" Funny we didn't run into you up there," Harry mused, dipping a mushroom into sauce. " On our way back."

" Back? " Brawnleigh cried. " Oh, sir, you don't mean—"

" My dear fellow, you don't really suppose we're in the Guianas for a *vacation*, do you? "

Brawnleigh struck his forehead. " Of course. It hadn't occurred to me what you were doing here. Then you must have —surely you weren't able to—? "

" Discover the juncture of the headwaters? Of course. That's what we set out to do, you know," Harry said gently. " We dropped in at your pygmy village on the way back. It was a bit sticky at first, I must admit, but fortunately I am rather good at picking up sign-language—"

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"Sign-language? Why, they communicate in grunts and bird-whistles!"

"What did you offer them?" Harry said coldly. He dislikes being corrected.

"Offer? Oh, we'd brought along some mirrors and some shiny beads and—"

"That explains it," Harry snapped. "They can't abide beads. Consider it a mortal insult. Respond with grunts and whistles. When they start to grunt and whistle, watch out."

"Oh lord," Brawnleigh said hopelessly, "how were we to know?"

"You can't win 'em all, old boy," Harry said cheerfully. "Takes experience."

After dinner Brawnleigh was no longer able to fight his exhaustion, so we bedded him down under the thatch near the bow. As Harry and I undressed in the cabin, I burst out, "I can tell you one thing, Harry Thrugg, I shall never play 'Scrabble' with you again without a dictionary. Eight letters indeed!"

"All right, all right," he mumbled, and blew out the light and got into bed. We lay there for a long time in the dark, listening to the slap of the water under us and the dreaming Brawnleigh cry out in his sleep.

Presently I said, "Harry, what are you thinking about?"

"Those photos."

"That was a fantastic break, wasn't it? It will save us so much trouble . . . Listen, Harry, I don't know what your immediate plans are for young Brawnleigh, but couldn't we keep him for a while, dear? I mean, he's such a good speller and all, and without a dictionary we'd simply have to switch to gin rummy, and I got so sick of it the year before last. And you said we ought to stay here at least another month or so; remember the time we were holed up in that ghastly little hut near the Zambi and were practically at each other's throats with boredom before it was time to come out? That was when we were mad about bridge and had such a ghastly time teaching those two idiot aborigines the simplest point-count system . . ."

Harry grunted. "We should have started 'em out with Culbertson. I told you so at the time."

"I'm not going all over that again. Anyway, having some other educated person about would be fun for a change," I pleaded. "Please, Harry. Just for a little while?"

"It's risky," Harry growled. "But—well, all right, Alice."

"Darling Harry," I said, giving his hand a squeeze, and went happily to sleep.

Having Tony around was idyllic. He was a gentleman right

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through, well-spoken and thoughtful in little things, and above all a superb speller. Even Harry did not argue with him so the games went along with delicious smoothness. He did get a bit restless and mentioned that he should be getting back to civilisation, but we managed to put him off.

Harry, of course, was most interested in Tony's impressions of the pygmy village. "You may have noticed things we missed," he said. "Fresh outlook, et cetera."

"I was only there a day," Brawnleigh protested. "Really, I couldn't actually get to know them, in the circumstances . . ."

"It's true they're hard to get close to," Harry mused, "even though we were there a week I'm sure there was a lot we missed."

"I remember the cute little babies," I volunteered. "Playing so adorably with their mothers. Mother-love is the same the world over."

Brawnleigh looked at me. "How extraordinary. I was under the impression that the fathers took care of the children. I distinctly saw—"

Harry cleared his throat, and frowned at me. "Alice means the baby monkeys," he said. "The tame ones. All over the compound."

"Indeed," Tony said. He looked puzzled. "I wonder if I had a touch of the fever without knowing it the day I was there."

"I'll bet you did!" I said enthusiastically. "That's why you got off to such a bad start with them!"

"Maybe," he said sceptically, and shook his head as if to clear it.

"How do you spell leucoryx?" Harry said.

"It has eight letters," Tony said glumly.

"Harry!" I said warningly.

"Merely asking," Harry said.

"Interesting thing, those huts," Harry prodded one evening at the cocktail hour. The terrible sun had just set and left the sky coloured like lemons, and under it the water was luminous green; the jungle noises were sweet at this hour and as the green of its depths blackened the great forest seemed to grow stiller. It was a time of gorgeous peace; right then I felt that I could have stayed there for ever. Harry too seemed more relaxed than usual, which might have accounted for some rather unfortunate errors he made. Tony had been almost silent for a few days, moody and a bit nervous. He had contradicted Harry flatly on several statements Harry had made about the pygmy village and I thought Harry should have let up on the subject a little.

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But he continued to bring it up. "Those huts—I've never seen a method of construction quite like that."

Tony bit into a potato-chip with a startled crackle. "Huts? What huts?"

"What do you mean, 'What huts?'" Harry said, blinking owlishly at him over the rim of his glass.

"Why, that tribe lives in trees," Brawnleigh declared flatly. "Don't you remember?"

"Ah." Harry leaned forward and plucked an olive out of the jar with a long forefinger. "Then you didn't notice. The small huts *behind* the clearing."

"There was nothing but jungle out there. When I was creeping round the outskirts, trying to get away—"

"Obviously you were too feverish to notice, if I may say so, old chap. Of course, the huts *are* difficult to find. They're covered with leaves and twigs."

"Well, I didn't see them," Brawnleigh said, a trifle sulkily. "Frankly I'm amazed that I could have missed them. Fever or not."

"Don't feel badly about it," Harry said expansively. "I don't think I'd have noticed the huts myself, except that they took me into one for the initiation rites."

"Initiation rites?"

"Well, they insisted that I join the tribe as a sort of honorary chief." He coughed modestly. "The ceremony is quite amusing. First they daub red mud from the river all over you, then the High Priest recites a weird chant—"

"I thought you said they communicate by sign-language." Brawnleigh put his Martini glass down and stared at Harry through the unshadowed twilight. There was a silence. "Besides," he continued very slowly, "there is one thing I know. The mud of the river is not red. It is clay, and it is yellow. I crawled on my belly through that mud. I know."

In the last of the thickened light I could see Harry's eyes like flat stones glimmering coldly on a pond bottom. Oh dear, I thought, and things had been so cosy.

Coubo interrupted with dinner, and we ate in silence, Harry thoughtful, Brawnleigh tight-lipped, and I depressed. In bed that night I pleaded, "Oh, Harry."

Harry said, "Sorry, Alice. No."

In the morning we came out into the sunlight and found Tony buckling up his pack. He had re-donned his puttees, binding them neatly with strong vines, and strapped on his gun. He turned to us, his face stern.

"I'm leaving," he said. "I cannot in honour remain and

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continue to accept your hospitality, in view of certain things which have come to light."

Harry leaned against the post and drew out his pipe and began to tamp it. "Is that so?" he said mildly. "Just what are these things which have come to light, old boy?"

Anthony Brawnleigh flushed and in his anger he looked very young, very proud, and—whether he knew it or not—very brave. "You damn well know. Excuse me," he said quickly to me. Then, to Harry, "You very well know, sir, that I am now aware of this tremendous fraud you are perpetrating. Because you saved my life, I will spare you and your wife the embarrassment of further discussion. I can only say that I deeply regret discovering such a hideous breach of honour in a man who—" here he choked a bit—"who has commanded not only the adulation of many, myself included, but the confidence of his peers, for achievements the authenticity of which I must now question."

"Well said," Harry remarked. "You should definitely have stuck to your English studies, young man."

Brawnleigh turned even redder. "I consider it most unseemly of you to joke, sir. I must inform you that I intend, upon my return, to turn in a full report to the Explorers' Club."

"Indeed?" Harry lit his pipe with great billowing puffs that almost obliterated his entire head. "And what do you intend to say to the Explorers' Club?"

"I intend to tell them," Brawnleigh began, clenching his fists at his sides and standing very erect, "that you are a fraud, sir. You had no intention of exploring the headwaters of the Booliwonga. You, instead of braving its dangers, encamped in a hidden inlet downriver in a safe section. There you remained hidden, in total comfort, drinking Martinis and playing games—'Scrabble,' sir! Really!—until it was time to emerge into the world with totally trumped-up tales of the dangers you never dreamt of exposing yourself to. For shame, sir! If this is not showing the white feather, what is?"

He bent down and heaved his pack to his shoulders. "I have no doubt that the other honours you have claimed are similarly undeserved. The Zambi! The Serra dos Apiacás!"

"Come now, Tony," I said reproachfully, "you surely don't expect a woman of my age to put up with such discomforts, do you?"

He bowed slightly towards me in farewell. "I had become quite fond of you," he said, biting his lip. "You *do* look rather like my Aunt Sophia. She used to read Kipling to me when I was a boy." He half turned towards Harry. "I'm sorry that

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I cannot shake hands," he said, " but I am sure you understand why. I do, however, have one request which I put to you as one gentleman to another. My chances of gaining the seaport at the mouth would be greatly enhanced if I might borrow a canoe. Riding a log is, as I discovered, a risky business."

" Why, certainly, old man." Harry knocked the dottle out of his pipe. He whistled for the boys on shore and held up two fingers. " I'll just see you out of the inlet," he said, as the boys brought out two canoes. " There's a nasty little sand-spit out there you might get stuck on." He nipped into one of the canoes and reached up to help Brawnleigh swing his pack into the other. " Careful with that," Harry said. " Wouldn't do to lose those films, eh? "

Brawnleigh saluted me briefly and swung over into his canoe, graceful, lithe, and incredibly stupid: a gentleman to the core.

As he and Harry skimmed out over the smooth waters of the inlet I turned and went back into the cabin. I always hate this part. I sighed, and reflected on the troubles people get themselves into by being true to type. If only Brawnleigh had not been so much of a gentleman, or even if he hadn't been so brave . . .

There was a shot and a splash, and presently Harry was aboard again, lugging the dripping pack, which he placed carefully in the corner of the cabin. " No use taking any chances on *these*," he said cheerfully, opening the pack, taking out the cans of film, and stacking them lovingly in the bottom of the suitcase. He rummaged thoughtfully around in the pack. " Few things here we can use," he mused. " Authentic."

After breakfast Harry rubbed his hands and cried, " Well, old girl, bring out the ' Scrabble ' and we'll have at it."

" No," I said.

" Oh, come along now, Alice, I promise I won't—"

" *No.*" I reached into the game-bag and brought out two decks of cards and slapped them down on the table.

Harry groaned. " Oh lord. Not gin rummy! "

" Gin rummy," I said very firmly. " I may not know how to spell, Harry, but I can count. Cut for deal."

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LOVE STORY

Bus. 5.30. City. Rush.
Typist. Fellow. Standing. Crush.
Handsome. Pretty. Glances. Lurch.
" Sorry." Date. Engagement. Church.

TIMOTHY NORFOLK

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VICTOR CANNING

Carnation Pattern

THE Department of Patterns has its headquarters in an old house on the Quai d'Orsay. Few people know about it, for it courts no publicity and its successes are always ascribed to the regular police organisations.

Its functions are twofold. It trains promising young men from the police and military intelligence, and it also deals with cases

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which others have long dropped as hopeless. And, of course, it is always looking for patterns, the odd twists and shapes that sometimes come up in the mass of official records.

Monsieur Alphonse Grand is the head of the department. He is a bluff, red-faced, whitehaired man of about sixty, looking like a farmer from his own Normandy. Little is known of his past even by the people he works with, but it has clearly not been a tranquil one. One finger of his right hand is missing and the back of the hand badly scarred. The stories about this mutilation are many, but the truth has yet to be known. And he is a man who is always approachable—if you have something of importance to take to him. Importance for Papa Grand lies mostly in the smallest and oddest of things.

Take this carnation pattern, for instance. I had a week's holiday in May and I went to a small hotel on the Atlantic coast below Arcachon. I am a well-organised man and I like my holidays to be that way. I played golf during the day on the Les Landes course, and the evenings I spent with a charming lady whose husband, for some reason I could never understand, preferred permanently the company of someone else. But it is not of this lady that I write.

One day in playing the seventh hole at Les Landes I put my ball into a bunker on the left-hand side of the fairway about fifty yards short of the green. I was playing round by myself and when I came out of the bunker it was to find the greenkeeper enjoying a cigarette under the pines just beyond. In the department we never advertise our profession. The greenkeeper knew me as a journalist from *Paris Match*. His name was Chaparigne, a weatherbeaten man of about fifty, and always ready for a chat. I sat down beside him and lit a cigarette.

He said, " That was a good shot from the Carnation."

" Carnation? "

He smiled. " That's my name for the bunker. I have names for them all, just for my own private reference."

" But why Carnation? "

" Ha, monsieur, why indeed? You're a journalist. Always on the lookout for stories, eh? Well, I can tell you a story about this bunker."

And he did. For the last four years on the morning of every 13th June, when he had come along to rake the bunker sand, he had found three or four carnations lying in the bunker. Regularly, year after year.

To a Department of Patterns man this was an intriguing piece of information.

" What kind of carnations? "

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" Just carnations. But not red or white. A kind of mixed-up colour. In fact last year I took them home for my wife, and my daughter—she's at the Bordeaux School of Art—painted one of them as an exercise."

" Have you told anyone about this? "

" No, monsieur. Just my family. You'd like to see the painting? My daughter's work is very good. Maybe your magazine would like to buy it? You could write a story about it, maybe? "

He brought it along the next day and I did buy it. It was very well done, and the carnation was a curious combination of mauves and pink.

In the evenings, when my mind was not on other things, I thought a lot about these carnations. Every year someone strewed them into the bunker. Romantic? Obviously a woman, I was sure. But why? A love now lost. Was it here they had met? I could picture her coming through the summer dawn each year to her carnation ceremony . . .

But when I got back to Paris and the department, I found not only the thought of the carnations persistently with me, but also a nagging picture of the bunker, deep and long and narrow like a grave. In the end I asked to see Papa Grand. Never neglect any pattern.

When I went into him, he was sitting at his desk by the little attic window overlooking the Seine.

" Ha, Belain; you had a good holiday? "

" Thank you, yes, patron."

" And now you have the look in your eyes of a man ready for work. What is it? "

I told him about the carnations and showed him the painting, and I finished, " I would like the Gironde police to investigate. A man or woman could be buried three or four feet down, and the body would never have been disturbed. Fresh sand is put in the bunker twice a year."

Papa Grand, looking at the carnation painting, said, " I had a brother who once grew carnations and I know something about them. This is a perpetual carnation and I think its name is Orchid Beauty. Not the kind normally grown for commercial purposes. Yes, of course, get on to the Gironde people. And tell them to do it quickly and discreetly."

Three days later Papa Grand sent for me. He was sitting at his desk as though he had never moved, and he was staring at an old pair of brown shoes.

Without looking up, he said, " Bonjour, Belain. A beautiful June day. One should be out in the sunshine, not pondering over

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old shoes. Your little bunker idea produced results. A man has been found buried in it. Been there for some years."

He gave me the details. The body, badly decomposed, was clad only in shirt, trousers, socks, and shoes. None of the clothes bore any identification marks and were practically rotted away. The face had been battered so that no features could be reconstructed.

The police doctor's report said the man was about forty, five feet ten tall, and had light brown hair. This description matched none of the records of missing local people.

"There are only the shoes, Belain." He held them up. "Handmade. All the maker's marks rotted away inside. But a distinctive brogue pattern. Put them in the stew-pot. I fancy our shoe expert will say they are English."

The stew-pot was the department where young men for training spent their first months checking and sifting all sorts of data, and subjecting articles of interest to expert examination. Within days we had an answer. Our shoe expert had had little trouble with them. The answer came in a confidential report from Scotland Yard as a result of our expert's request to them to take the shoes to Beele's in London. And the answer made me sit up with a jerk and apply at once to see Papa Grand.

"Ha, Belain," he said, "I can see from the light in your eyes that something has turned up."

"Patron, Beele's have identified the brogues as a pair supplied to Captain Pierre Broussac six years ago. Five feet ten inches, light brown hair. That fits his description. Also he was a well-known amateur golfer."

Papa Grand said nothing for a moment. He got up and gazed out of the window; then, not looking at me, he said, "Beele's can have made no mistake?"

"No, patron. Broussac was an old customer. These were to his special design and never copied."

"So, he was particular about his shoes. Always the best. But what is he doing murdered in a bunker when the world thinks he is in Russia? Belain, leave this with me for a while. I must speak to the Ministry of the Armed Forces."

I didn't hear anything from Papa Grand for two days. But I thought about Capitaine de Corvette Pierre Broussac a lot. Five years previously he had been involved in a great scandal. He had worked on the security side of naval intelligence at a research station near Toulon where highly secret work was being done on new submarine detection devices. Then one day he had walked off with a file of the latest plans and specifications of three new instruments. He had been traced to Switzerland and finally

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Hungary, and reports had come through that he had gone over to the Russians. The Russians had never denied this.

Two days later Papa Grand came into my room—an exceptional procedure—and said, " Belain, it has been decided with the Contre-Amiral in charge of naval intelligence that you continue work on this Broussac case. Ever since Broussac disappeared they have suspected that there was a leak in their department. They don't intend to announce the discovery of Broussac's body and they want us to handle it—only the Contre-Amiral knows what has happened so far. It's all yours. But you must be discreet, anonymous, a shadow . . . we don't want anyone to know what's going on. Keep in touch with me personally each day. Even the Gironde police are not to know he was Broussac."

So I packed my clubs and motored down to book into my old hotel. Unhappily my charming friend had gone off to Switzerland, so I was going to miss my evening company. But this was work, so maybe it was as well to have no distraction. A pity, though.

The next morning I had a look at the Carnation bunker. It was quite close to a long stretch of pine woods and the whole fairway was in a natural, dune-crested bowl. It was isolated and a man could have been buried there at night without any great fear of interruption. The main road was just beyond the pine wood.

I played there for three days, picking a partner from anyone who wished for a game, and playing twice with the secretary. He was a Monsieur Gamelard, about forty, short, strongly made, and almost completely bald. He was annoyed about the discovery of the body as it was bad publicity for the club, and his language when he spoke about the affair was vivid and strong. A body in one of his bunkers! It was sacrilege!

I didn't care to think what he would have said if he had known that for two nights running I had let myself into his office with a skeleton key. In the office were the past records for many years of the visitors to the club and the payment of green fees. I found Broussac's name there. Apparently each year, either in May or June, he had played for a week at the club. And he had always played with another naval officer—Capitaine de Vaisseau André Bonnet.

I let Papa Grand know this, and he informed me that Captain Bonnet had been at Toulon but was now stationed in Paris. He, too, was a naval intelligence officer and had been working with Broussac at the time of his disappearance. Papa Grand said he would have a full investigation made of Bonnet.

In addition, I told Papa Grand that as it was only a few days

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now to 13th June, I proposed to keep watch in the bunker during the night of the 12th-13th.

While I was waiting for the night of my vigil, I had a message from Papa Grand.

> Captain Bonnet frequently wears a carnation buttonhole. Lives in Paris flat, no garden or greenhouse, but flowers believed sent to him once a week from Bordeaux district. Spends weekends away from Paris. Is being watched.

It wasn't much. A lot of men wear carnation buttonholes. And, anyway, Bonnet was in the security service and had been a close friend of Broussac. I was more interested in the woman—for I was sure it must be a woman—who strewed carnations in the bunker. The power of love, lost or unrequited, is a tremendous thing.

At sunset on the 12th June I hid myself in the pine trees above the bunker, with the main road three hundred yards away behind me. It was a warm night and quite light with stars, though after midnight a slight ground mist began to curl up. It must have been about an hour before dawn when I heard the sound of a car on the road. It stopped and there was a silence as the engine was switched off.

A few moments later came the cracking and shuffle of pine needles and bracken under the trees. Fifty yards away a shape moved through the waist-high mist. It was a woman. My mysterious, unknown mourner . . .

She was wearing a white raincoat and had a coloured scarf over her head. I watched as she went down across the turf to the bunker. I saw her hesitate for a moment and look round. Then I saw her hand go up in a graceful gesture and I knew she was throwing carnations on to the sand. When this was done, she crossed herself and then knelt slowly on the wet turf. I didn't wait for any more. I turned and went quickly back through the pines to the road and found the car. There was no one in it.

It was a big, black, oldfashioned touring Mercedes. It looked like a special body to me. The hood was down and there was a tonneau cover over the back seats. I unfastened the cover and pulled the back of the seat next to the driving seat forward and wriggled in under. I then pulled the seat back and reached up around the seat and clipped the cover tight on the seat fastening. I slid on to the back seat and curled up.

Within a few minutes the woman was back. As she got into the car, I caught a drift of her scent . . . how evocative, romantic, and wonderful is a woman's scent . . . The car started and we

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were heading north back along the road to Arcachon and Bordeaux. We drove for an hour and we drove fast.

At the end of the drive, I heard gravel crunching under the wheels. Then the car stopped and the woman got out. A door slammed. There was silence except for the morning chorus of the birds. I gave her a few moments and then crawled cautiously out. I was in a small garage. The large entrance doors were open and there was a small side door in the wall which I guessed led into a house.

I went to the doors and looked out. A long gravel sweep curved away to tall iron gates. There was a stretch of lawn, studded with trees, running down to a small river. To my right I saw the façade of a small château-like villa with blue slate turrets that gleamed in the morning sun. The doorway was pillared and flanked by two wrought-iron lanterns. There wasn't another house in sight. Beyond the house and farther down the river was a long flat stretch of meadow.

For confidence I patted the gun in my pocket, and then went back to the side door and into the house. I had no difficulty finding her. I just followed the smell of coffee and eventually crossed a large salon to a conservatory which had been built on to the side of the house facing the water meadow. She was sitting by a small table which held a breakfast tray and a coffee percolator. One side of the conservatory was lined with open shelves, along which ran rows and rows of perpetual carnations in pots, the long growths supported with bamboo canes and wire rings.

She was a handsome woman of about thirty, blonde and well built, but there was a suggestion of haggardness in her face and her eyes were a bright, almost staring blue. I had the impression of a woman who was only half in this world. Knowing nothing about her, I felt an enormous sympathy for her. Without doubt she had loved the dead man.

She showed no surprise at my presence, and merely said, "Monsieur?"

I said frankly, "I am from the police. Early this morning you placed carnations in a bunker on the Les Landes golf course. You have done this for some years on the same date. A little while ago the body of Captain Pierre Broussac was found in the bunker."

Just for a moment I saw her eyes close and she gave a half sigh, almost of relief. Then calmly she motioned me to sit down. She poured coffee into two cups. Seeing my eyes on the second cup, she said, "It is all right. I was expecting a visitor, but he must have been delayed." She handed me the coffee.

"The world thinks that Captain Broussac deserted to Russia

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with important secrets. But he was murdered and buried in a bunker. Why?"

"Because it was necessary, monsieur. Yes, although he loved me and I loved him, it was necessary. You see, monsieur, I am Hungarian by birth. When I came to France my parents were still behind the Iron Curtain and I had to work here in the West... If I did not do what my masters wanted, then my parents would suffer.

"My name is Lydja Hortovic. I was sent here to work on counter naval intelligence with Captain Bonnet. He is the real spy, monsieur. But I fell in love with his friend, poor beloved Pierre. But one day Bonnet comes to me and tells me that he is certain that Pierre has discovered about him and about us..."

She turned away from me, her hands covering her eyes. "I had no choice, monsieur. Pierre had to die. If he did not, then my parents and myself would have been destroyed... Oh, so many times since then I have wished that I had found the courage to risk everything. I drove down to Les Landes to meet Pierre one evening after his golf and we parked the car in the pines where we had so often made love. And then Bonnet murdered him and that night buried him in the bunker. From that moment, although I must still work with Bonnet and he comes here most weekends, I have hated him.

"Through Bonnet it was easy to get our organisation to put out a false trail to make it seem as though Pierre had gone to Russia. But once a year I put the flowers that Pierre loved so much on his grave..." Her eyes were on me, clouded for a moment with fatigue. "That is all, monsieur. I do not care what happens to me. My parents are now dead, and so is Pierre... and I am dead too. Deep inside, I am dead, dead, dead... Many times I have thought of ending it all."

"Very dramatic," said a voice harshly from behind us.

I screwed round, my hand dropping to my pocket. But I got no farther. Standing in the doorway, pistol in hand, was a tall, dark man in a grey lounge suit—whom I had no difficulty in recognising from the photographs I had seen in my Paris briefing as Captain Bonnet.

He moved over to me, jabbed the pistol into my side, and slid his hand into my pocket, taking my gun. Then he stepped back, and with a grim curl of his lips he said to Lydja, "You shall have your wish soon, but not here. Why should it be quick?" His voice rose, icy and cutting now. "You stupid romantic bitch! So you had to go and put flowers on his grave! This stupid little act and now we must all move."

I said, "I don't know what you've got in mind, Bonnet, but it

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won't work. My department has been watching you for days. The moment you left Paris they will have been after you."

He shook his head. "I don't know your name, monsieur, but there are things you should know. Long ago I, like you, worked for Papa Grand. I know his methods. Some days ago I read that an unknown body had been found in one of the Les Landes bunkers. For the last week I have known that I have been watched. When I left Paris I knew I might be followed, and I was—by Papa Grand himself. He's in my car outside.

"I stopped in Bordeaux for early coffee. He parked across the square and I went over to him and invited him to join me. Papa Grand can never resist the outrageous. He joined me and I doped his coffee.

"He went out very quickly and the kindly café proprietor helped me to carry him to my car. I would look after the old gentleman, I said. And so I will; I have a natural affection for him. He will be out for hours and will be left here.

"But we three, monsieur, will be on our way. Lydja to get what she so longs for; you, well—there is a lot of new development in your department which would be of interest to my people, no matter how stubborn you may be at first to talk. . . . Ha, listen. That will be Gamelard."

Distantly and growing louder I heard the beat of a plane's engine.

"Gamelard!"

Bonnet smiled. "Gamelard, monsieur. You did not know he was one of us? And a very good pilot, too. Once the body was discovered, we knew that we had little time left."

Through the conservatory windows I saw the shadow of a plane sweep across the long flat river meadow. I knew what would happen. A light plane. Only a few hours to Switzerland and some other private field for refuelling, and then away again eastwards!

The plane came down, bumping for a moment at the far end of the field and then running up towards the house and finally turning away just out of sight of the conservatory windows.

Bonnet stood aside, waving his pistol at us.

"You first, Lydja, and then you, monsieur. And do not be rash. One false move and I shall not hesitate."

Lydja moved into the salon and I followed her. We went across it and into the hall. The front door stood open, the sunlight bright on the gravel and lawns outside. I followed Lydja down the steps and could hear Bonnet close behind me. We went round the house and through a small wooden gate into the river meadow. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a saloon car

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parked by the garage and thought of poor Papa Grand lying drugged on the back seat . . .

The plane's engine was ticking over gently, the propeller sending great waves of air across the meadow grasses. A man in a leather flying-jacket and cloth cap stood alongside the plane, one hand resting on the ledge of the open fuselage door. He had his back to us and was reaching up, fastening the door open.

" Gamelard," shouted Bonnet. The man half turned and waved. Then he swung round and began to come across the grass towards us. As he came, I had a swift impression of something being wrong. Then I realised that it wasn't Gamelard. I knew this man well, the way he walked and looked.

" Stop! " The word came curtly from behind us. Lydja and I stopped.

There was no doubt now. The man coming towards us was Papa Grand. With his big, farmer-walking stride, he came unconcernedly over the grass and he was smiling at us.

" Patron," I shouted, " he's armed! "

Papa Grand gave an easy shrug and came on. I half turned and saw Bonnet with his pistol raised.

" Stay where you are, Papa Grand," said Bonnet. There was only about five yards between us now; and Papa Grand this time halted.

He took off his cloth cap and ran one hand over his broad forehead. Bonnet moved to one side and covered all three of us. " Where is Gamelard? " he said.

" My dear Bonnet," said Papa Grand, " he is in the plane. I met him as he stepped out and welcomed him with one of your car spanners. But he will recover."

" I can fly the plane," said Bonnet. " Even though it means I must go with only Gamelard as a passenger. You know, too, what it forces me to do with the three of you."

Papa Grand shook his head. " No, Bonnet, you are wrong. It was many years ago that you did your term in the department. We have improved our methods a great deal since then. Also, if I remember, when you passed out your grading wasn't a top one. Assez bien, only. You had little moments of carelessness. Like not thinking about Broussac's shoes. You see, mon cher Bonnet, one must always check and double-check. Oh, I knew you would know we would soon be after you. Hence these arrangements to leave . . ." His hand waved towards the plane.

" But what you didn't know was that I had a man in your flat while you were at work, and I had a man go through your clothes even while you were sleeping one night in your bed. Through everything you owned, Bonnet. That's why I drank

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your drugged coffee happily. Because the drug had been changed to a harmless powder. But I play-acted for you.

"And also that—" He nodded towards Bonnet's pistol. "Try it. You loaded it this morning from the ammunition box in your dressing-table drawer where the gun lay empty alongside it. Try it, Bonnet—they are not even blanks which might burn at a few yards. They're nothing." As he spoke, Papa Grand pulled a gun from his own pocket.

I saw Bonnet's hand move, heard the snap of the pistol mechanism, but no report.

Papa Grand smiled at me. "Take a lesson, Belain. Check everything when you gamble for high stakes. And now, let us go back to the house. The police should be here in a few moments." He bowed to Lydja. "My apologies, but I took the liberty of telephoning them from your bedroom while I was waiting for Gamelard to arrive."

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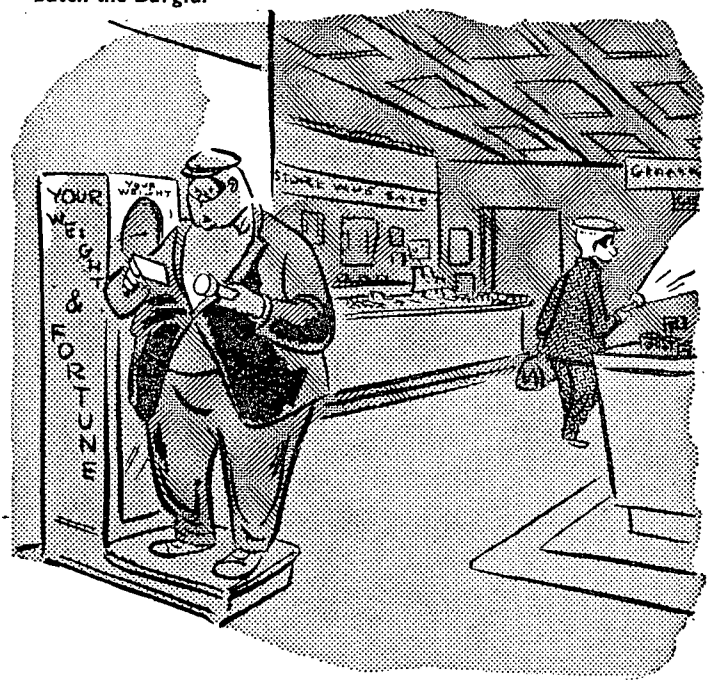
Butch the Burglar



" 'You are scrupulously honest in all your dealings.' Golly, what a swindle this thing is!"

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An ARGOSY "first"
by a young Australian

THAT'S LIVING

"It's all meaningless," Alan said.
"Life is a joke in bad taste."

BY CRAIG McGREGOR

THE four cars came fast and close together over the crest of the hill and slid down the long concrete descent to the coast. There were only a few yards between them, the cream-and-black car in front and then the green one and the two red ones bringing up the rear.

They were M.G.s, lean and low-slung, the thin scream of their high-revving engines cutting through the exhaust racket like the whine of a dentist's drill. Hoods down, tonneau covers flapping, and wireless aerials bent back in long whiplash arcs, they bounced steadily and rhythmically over the tar joints in the concrete roadway.

In the rear car Jon Simpson glanced down at his rev counter. It was nudging four thousand revs a minute, the counter needle edging up to the white marker and then swinging back again. Seventy miles an hour. Alan must be in a hurry for his swim.

He looked ahead to where Alan was sitting calm and relaxed behind the wheel of the front car, red cravat waving in the wind and cloth motoring cap set squarely upon his head. From astern the car seemed to be entirely cream, but as it swept into a fast left-hand curve Jon could see the glossy black line which flared from the streamlined bonnet to the rear wheels. The chromium-plated wheel flanges spun brilliantly in the sunlight like miniature propellers as Alan piloted the car through the turn, nearside wheels within inches of the loose dirt verge of the road. He was a good driver.

Behind him came Mike in his squat, high-wheeled M.G. "TC," its hard-sprung body jolting over the slab joints more noticeably than the other cars. It was adorned with leopardskin seat covers; and from the top of his radio aerial a wolf's tail bobbed erratically—"ineffable vulgarity," Alan had labelled it,

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but Mike was an exhibitionist and knew it and didn't mind if anyone else knew it too.

Then, immediately ahead, was Johnston's battered racer, the offside mudguards showing the scars of Johnno's most recent prang: a sideswipe with a motorised cement-mixer which had unsportingly refused to let him pass on the inside.

Jon glanced across to where his fianceé, Pam, sat beside him, her long black hair hanging in a loose ponytail and her eyes narrowed against the wind. She had one hand resting on the panic handle for support as Jon followed the other cars through the fast left-hander. Looking at her, feeling the slipstream whipping sudden bursts through his hair, clumps of trees rushing past in swift whooshes of sound, in his ears the noise of the wind and the motor's valve chatter and the hiss of racing tyres on the road; conscious of the narrow bonnet of the car almost colourless in the glare of the sun, the white concrete road dipping and rippling through the heatwaves, the tall vine-clad trees of the mountain and the washed-out blue of the sky . . . suddenly aware of this, Jon felt a precise and exquisite happiness surge through him. He felt powerful and skilful and exhilarant.

"Hullo," he said. He had to shout to make her hear above the blare of the car and the rush of wind past them.

"Hullo, yourself." She smiled quickly at him. She was very tanned and her tar-black eyes were shining. "Alan's setting quite a pace, isn't he?"

"Yeah. Must be the hangover," Jon said. "Probably anxious to wash it away. He was bloody full last night."

"Yes," she said. "By the way, what were you two talking about for so long in the kitchen?" She shouted the words out in little clusters which were caught quickly and flung away by the wind.

"Nothing much. I'll tell you later," Jon said. "Do you feel like a beer at The Rex?"

"What?"

"I said, would you like a beer at The Rex?"

She smiled at him in her characteristic way, eyes upturned at the edges and impish laughter in them. "Very much. But Alan might drive straight past the pub today."

"That's all right," he said. "We'll head him off."

Jon settled back in the car seat. They were into the curves now, speed down to fifty miles an hour as the road curled round the foothills of the pass. The mountain reached down into the coastal plain like some giant Moreton Bay fig tree thrusting muscular roots out into the surrounding earth, the roots separated by valleys which ran down to the sea and ended in the short

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sandy beaches of the coast. It was a dangerous place for overtaking.

He waited until the cars reached the next short straight and then double-shuffled into third gear, letting the clutch out quickly so the car crunched forward as the wheels absorbed the extra traction. He accelerated hard, swung the car to the right, and was past Johnno before the other realised what was happening.

Mike, however, saw him coming. Jon saw his hand drop to the gearstick. Flattening his foot on the accelerator, Jon forced his car up level with the green " TC " and snatched a racing change into top gear. The car sprang forward, and a few seconds later he was drifting into the next corner well ahead of the following car. He glanced into his rear vision mirror. Mike was grinning and gesturing obscenely. He waved back and set out after Alan.

The gleaming cream-and-black M.G. was a good thirty yards ahead. Alan was driving as nonchalantly as ever, the telescopic steering-wheel pulled well up against his chest in his rather cramped driving position, but Jon knew he was accelerating by the way the car began to bounce higher on the tar joints.

Jon realised he couldn't outspeed the other car but he was confident he could corner faster. Each time they reached a curve he waited until the last second before braking, and each time he gained a few yards. Alan began to brake later and later, the red stop-lights flashing on just before each curve began. The other two cars had been left well behind.

The excitement caught Jon up and drew him tensely forward on his seat. His lips were dry and seemed to stick together. He carefully readjusted his grip on the four-spoke steering-wheel. Pam was leaning forward close to the windshield, both hands holding the panic handle and an excited smile on her mouth.

" He's really pushing it along," Jon said.

She nodded.

A long straight swung into view, the road broad and empty in the sunlight. The two sports cars raced along it together, lurching regularly over the concrete like a truck crossing a long wooden bridge, their bonnets rising and falling in a measured rhythm completely out of keeping with their speed. Jon looked down at his speedo. It was just past the ninety mark and still climbing.

He gripped the steering-wheel tightly, feeling it shudder and tremble as the tyres left the surface of the road and the car jolted off course. There was only a length separating the two cars now. He hoped Alan would not have to brake suddenly.

The corner came quickly towards them but neither car slackened speed. At a hundred miles an hour Jon manœuvred

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his M.G. into the centre of the roadway so it was on the outside of the other car but still behind. They came into the approach to the corner and Jon watched Alan's stop-lights out of the corner of his eye.

Suddenly they flashed on. Jon took his foot off the accelerator but kept it free of the brake. His car came up quickly beside Alan's and then ahead, but by now they were well into the turn. Jon had a glimpse of Alan hunched over the wheel and then his own car was in a four-wheel drift and sliding fast across the apex of the curve.

He held on to it rigidly. The tyres were screaming and he felt the offside dip crazily under the strain of keeping the car upright. For a frantic instant he had time to wish he had fitted anti-roll bars to the car. Alan had pulled over to give him more room but it was traction, not space, he needed now. The near front wheel lifted momentarily, and for a second Jon was afraid the car would flip over. It seemed to teeter uncertainly.

Then the wheel touched down again and stayed there. Jon hit the accelerator with his foot. Tail wagging badly, tyres still screeching, the M.G. drove itself out of the turn.

A few seconds later they were scooting along the bitumen road to the Hotel Rex. He pulled up in a spatter of pebbles and levered himself stiffly out of the driving-seat. Standing, his legs felt weak and jumpy. It had been too close.

Alan swung into the courtyard and halted beside him, parking with his usual precise care. He switched off, climbed out, and walked across with his current woman, a pink-sweatered honey blonde wearing a rather too pointed uplift bra, to where Jon and Pam were standing. He was a lean, athletic man of thirty with a thin ginger moustache, wavy red hair, and an angular face crinkled with laughter lines. He was dressed in a knotted red cravat, flannel slacks, Argyll socks, and mustard-coloured suède shoes.

Jon watched him come and grinned to himself at the way Alan refused to meet his eyes, which meant he was annoyed. He had a great affection for Alan.

"They ought to lock you up as part of the road safety campaign," Alan said when he reached them. "Or send your ashes round as a warning. You nearly killed yourself that time."

"I know," said Jon. "You were going too fast."

"Me?" said Alan. "*Me* going too fast? What did you have to pass me on a corner for?"

"Sorry, mate. Pam here wanted a drink, and we thought you might give the pub a miss and make straight for the beach." He could see Alan was upset. "I'm sorry," he repeated. "I didn't mean to run you out of road."

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"You didn't. I had plenty of room. It was you I was worried about. I just don't want the job of scraping up your remains after the next prang." Alan smiled. "Anyhow, you ought to know me better than that, m'lad. My jalopy's well trained: never passes an open pub."

He walked back to his car and began to fix a black leather tonneau cover over the two open seats.

Watching him go, Jon thought, I do know you better than that. A year ago Alan had been pouring gin over his cornflakes for breakfast; he wasn't so bad now, but he still drank too much. In many ways Alan had been born out of his time: he was a throwback to the 1920s: a hard and frenetic liver determined to sample everything life had to offer. He always carried a hip flask of gin or brandy with him, had a fierce passion for jazz and ragtime, was an acknowledged expert on vintage cars, and had once possessed a huge crowd-stopping Sunbeam with shining brass exhausts and the steering characteristics of a small tank.

He was intelligent without being an intellectual; dressed flamboyantly but in good taste; was regarded as an asset to any party; and usually had a plentiful supply of lively and mammary blondes. He was the sort of man women hope to marry and reform afterwards. So far Jon hadn't thought much of their chances.

A couple of minutes later Johnno and Mike rolled into the courtyard, the first in a gentle loop which brought his car to a halt next to Alan's and the second in a dramatic slide which showered the other cars with pebbles and ended with the M.G. leaning against the close-cropped lawn.

"Some day I'm going to teach you to drive," Jon called out.

The four drivers and their women strolled across the courtyard and into the foyer of the hotel. It was a modern, low-roofed building with lots of panelled wood and greenery in pots and a smart garish decor. They walked through to the beer garden at the rear, dragged together two of the white-painted wooden tables, and sat down under the open trellis. Outside the beer garden was an empty paddock, brown and dry-looking and littered with rusty tins; it stretched unbroken to an eroded cliff edge and then the long blue of the Pacific. It was almost ten o'clock.

The waiter came and wiped down the tables with a damp cloth. He was fat and sweated slightly, even though he had taken off his coat and was wearing a white shirt with the sleeves rolled up. The men ordered beers, the women gin squashes.

They talked cheerfully, glad to have the long day ahead of them and the swimming and conscious of the brightly-striped towels

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and beach umbrellas piled in the backs of their cars. The drinks arrived and they sat lazily with them in the sunshine, grouped around the tables in a big communal circle and laughing easily. Now they were out of the slipstream of their cars they were warming up.

Jon felt the sun piercing the skin of his arm in quick, sharp needle-jabs as he drank from his tall globule-encrusted glass. It would be a good day at the beach. It was still thirty miles away down the coast but they would make that in less than half an hour. They always made for one of the beaches well south of Sydney because they enjoyed the clean fast drive down the coast.

They ordered another round of drinks and talked about cars and the coming sports-car races at Bathurst. Alan had taken part in some club racing a few years before and was accepted as the best driver of the group, though Jon often outspeeded him on their weekend excursions. Alan was fast but unflurried, always in control of his car; he rarely took risks and never tried anything which wasn't within his power. Unlike Jon, who was almost eight years younger, he was good and knew it and didn't have to keep proving it to himself.

The drinks arrived: beers this time, because Mike had objected that gin squashes were too expensive. Jon wiped his dripping glass on the cardboard beer sop, held it against the sunlight, and then sank his top lip into the froth. He sucked in some of the collar and then the beer, cold and liquid and effervescent, tingling against the tongue. He swallowed deeply until the glass was half empty, then replaced it on the white railing table.

"Bloody good," he said.

He looked across at the other men. We're an ill-assorted mob, he thought. Alan, complex, outwardly suave and self-possessed, whose gin-swilling gave him away; Johnston, quiet and loyal and given to wearing suits with waistcoats; Mike, a potential hooligan but a pleasant one; and himself, young, facile, and with a dangerous capacity for introspection. The only thing we really have in common, he thought, is a love of sports cars.

After they had finished their drinks they bought some iced bottles of beer and moved outside to their cars. The green one, the cream-and-black, and the two reds. The machines were waiting for them, parked in a row, quiet now and unmoving, dead almost, but lethal. They climbed aboard, fingered the starter solenoids, and drove off. In four successive roars, exhausts burbling and gravel scattering on to the lawn, they accelerated through the gates of the hotel courtyard. The highway lay waiting for them.

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Behind them the perspiring waiter in the white shirtsleeves began collecting the eight wet beer sops.

The beach was smooth and wide and coated in a fine white sand which petered out into sandhills topped by tufts and hillocks of coarse grass. It was almost deserted except for a few gaudy umbrellas near the rocks at the southern end, but they knew the afternoon crowd wouldn't be long arriving. Once the shops closed at midday the surf club boys with their long shark-nosed surfboards would be down to try the waves, and then the crowd of Saturday-morning workers.

They changed quickly in two low dressing-sheds with red tin roofs, and while the women arranged themselves delicately on the sand the men ran down to the sea and plunged into the waves. Two rocky headlands enclosed the beach so the surf rolled in straight and regular and true.

They swam out about a hundred yards and caught wave after wave into the shore, sliding in a flurry of foam down the front of each breaker and riding it until their chests scraped the sand of the beach. The waves came in quick succession and they tired fast.

Back on the beach they lay down next to the women in a rough circle, heads together and bodies spread out like the petals of a flower. Jon opened the beer they had bought at the hotel and handed the dark brown bottles round to the others. They drank slowly and carelessly, spilling some on the sand. The sun was hot upon their bodies and the beer cool and flushing in their stomachs.

Alan wiped the froth from his moustache, yawned at the sunlight falling impersonally on people and myriad specks of sand and sleepy dogs alike, and closed his eyes.

"Jon," he said.

"Yeah," Jon answered.

"You know, it's not such a bad life," Alan said.

Jon hefted himself on to one elbow and squinted at his friend. The sun cobwebbed his eyelashes with rainbows but he could see Alan lying contentedly on his back, wet sand clinging to his hair.

"Bit of a change from last night," Jon said.

Alan just grunted.

Jon lay back and screwed his eyes tight against the glare and then relaxed them so they would tan evenly and thought about last night . . .

He remembered leaving the party when it was in full swing and going out to the kitchen to get some more beers off the ice

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and being surprised to see Alan's tall figure bulking large and still against the big square panes of glass which lined one side of the room. He was staring, glass in hand, at the lights of the ferries which drifted back and forth above the black water of Sydney Harbour. It had been dark in the kitchen and all Jon had been able to see at first was the silhouette of Alan's body framed in the window and the fall of light on his hand.

He went up to Alan and stood beside him, and the two of them looked quietly at the black harbour and the silent, floating lights. After a while Jon said, " Are you all right? "

" Yes," Alan said. He didn't move.

" What are you doing out here by yourself? Aren't you enjoying the party? "

" Sometimes parties make me sick," Alan said. He remained looking through the plate-glass window. " They stick in my throat."

Jon walked back to the refrigerator and poured himself a beer. Sometimes Alan got these fits of depression, when he thought too deeply or for too long about things; usually he drowned his questionings in alcohol, but occasionally it just didn't work.

Jon rejoined his friend at the window. Silently, they looked down at the vague dissolving outlines of bushes and trees immediately below them, and then at the thin lamplit strip of road with their sports cars parked in the shadows along the edge, and then down into the featureless, unshimmering expanse of the harbour. From behind them, in the other room, came shrieks of female laughter.

" Sometimes I wonder what the hell it all adds up to," Alan said.

Jon said nothing.

" I mean, what the hell does it all mean? What does all this—" he jerked his head back at the kitchen and the noise of the party behind them and everything around them—" what does all this add up to? I don't understand it, I don't know what we are doing or where we are going or whether it has any significance at all."

" I thought you'd worked out an answer to all this," Jon said.

" Who ever works out an answer? There is no answer. You just come to some compromise so you can keep on living, that's all. You decide not to think about it too much. If you think about this too much, you go mad."

I wonder what's brought this on tonight, Jon thought. I wonder what's upset him. Because I know he feels like this and he is right but it is usually well covered up. Too well covered up. Alan Burge. The character. Good bloke. Everyone's friend.

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And underneath the gut-cutting, ice-packed self-doubt, the bruised membrane of soul. Gin to staunch the heart's bleeding.

" Alan," he said, " you've got to live with it."

" I'm sick of living with it," Alan said. " I can't take it much more." He turned round and his eyes were wet but he did not seem drunk. Jon noticed his face was lined about the mouth and he looked older than thirty. " Everyone's dying and everyone's getting hurt. I can't do anything about it. I can't make it stop and I can't help any of them. I can't even help myself. What am I doing here? "

" All you can do is live with it," Jon repeated.

" You sound just like a parson," Alan said. He paused, and turned back to the window.

" What gets me is that it all comes to nothing. No matter what you do or who you are, you end up with dirt in your mouth. Everyone. It's the final humiliation. I mean, I'm not afraid to die. I don't give a damn if I die tomorrow. You know that. But it makes everything you've ever been or done—it makes it all meaningless.

" A lifetime of loving and hating and sweating and copulating, and then nothing. All that trying and hoping and wanting—it might as well not have happened. You might as well have stayed in the womb. Life is a joke in bad taste."

They were silent for a while.

" Look," Jon said. He hesitated. He wasn't sure how to say it. " Look," he said, " I know this. I suppose anybody who thinks at all knows this. But you've still got to keep on living. You've got to hold fast to the good things and the things which mean something to you, and forget about the rest."

He stopped.

" The only other thing you can do is kill yourself," he said.

Alan swung round to face him. He looked seriously, intently at Jon; then broke into a wry smile.

" I got the blues tonight, man," he said, " but I ain't gonna kill myself just yet." He raised his glass to his mouth and upended it and drained it of beer in one long continuous swallow. It was a characteristic gesture.

He set the glass down on the windowledge, wiped his moustache, and turned his back on the unchanging, motionless harbour. " I mean, think of all them womens with their bellies rubbin' on the ground and all them hot cats screamin' and wailin' and blowin' up a storm, and think of all them hot donks with twin cams and what burnt methane smells like—I mean, man, *think* of it. Hell, man, that's *living*."

Jon laughed. Whenever Alan slipped into his jazz lingo it

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meant he was feeling all right. It was a sort of standing joke between them: whenever they got happy they would start gibbering in a crazy jazz argot of their own. Alan must have snapped out of it. Suddenly he felt slightly hysterical, as though he wanted to scream, and he realised he was a bit drunk.

"I mean *think* of it," he said loudly. "I mean think of all them bottles flyin' and tables goin' over and all them cats hollerin' and cryin' and jumpin' round—"

"—and then some of them tall cats; I mean *tall*, man, started stompin' and sukey-jumpin'—

"—and the womens started dancin'—

"—and the band started wailin'—

"—and the next thing everybody was gittin' happy and cryin' and doin' a little boogie woogie—

"—I mean think of it, man, that's *living*, I mean that's really LIVING."

Arm in arm, shouting, they strode off towards the party.

Jon glanced to where Alan was stretched out on the sand, his chest rising and falling heavily as though he were asleep. Alan. Tender, exacerbated, alcoholic.

"I mean, that's living," Jon said softly.

There was no reply.

Late afternoon. The sun slanted across the beach in long shadows but the warmth had gone and every tiny depression in the sand had a dark side and a sunny side. There had been a slight wind blowing all day, but now they noticed it for the first time.

The men went in for a last swim and ran back to the dressing-sheds. The women had been careful to dry their costumes in the sun while still wearing them and now slipped sunfrocks over the top.

They walked to where their cars were parked behind the sandhills and slowly arranged themselves in sweaters for the long drive home. Alan gave the signal to start and the four cars nosed on to the highway, heading north for Sydney.

They drove quickly but carefully, without the exuberance of the morning. They were all tired and relaxed after the swimming and the sun and they drove without talking, the girls quiet and snuggling down into the car seats, the men with arms resting easily against the cut-away sidedoors. The four cars kept close together and they did not try to overtake each other.

By the time they had reached the mountains the sun was gone and cold was curling round the trunks of the giant trees and round the vines and the creepers, and a light mist was gathering deep in the valleys. They pulled over to the side of the road and

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halted in line astern, wheels churning up the dust slightly. The drivers fixed the canvas-and-plastic windshields along the sides of their cars, then stood talking quietly before setting out on the last stretch home.

"We going up the pass again?" Jon asked.

No one answered.

Mike stamped both feet on the ground in succession.

"Why don't we cut across and over the military road?" Alan said. "Haven't been that way before."

"It's longer than up the pass," Mike said.

"But it's faster. We can make good time," Jon said.

"All right."

They turned back to their cars. Jon walked part of the way with Alan.

"Listen," he said, "we won't be stopping again."

"No," said Alan.

"So I'll see you tomorrow."

Alan hesitated. "Yes," he said. "See you tomorrow."

"Anything wrong?"

"No."

"Hooroo."

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"Hooroo."

Jon shivered a little. It was late summer and the afternoons were getting cold . . .

The climb over the mountain was gradual and well engineered. It had been built by the Army as a defence road during the war and the engineers had been careful to avoid any steep gradients. The four sports cars raced through the wide cambered curves without slackening speed, swapping places every now and then as the climb favoured their different gear ratios. Now they were nearly home the drivers didn't feel so tired.

Jon settled down to third in the line, prepared to let the others make the pace and automatically following the tail-lights of the car ahead. It was dusk now and all four cars had switched on their sidelights, but it was only a precaution against the police: they would be home before it was dark enough to use the headlights. Jon could see the twin reflections of Alan's sidelights in his rear vision mirror, the pinpoints shuddering and bouncing as the mirror vibrated with road shock.

They reached the crest of the mountain at last and coasted quickly along a flat plateau to rejoin the highway. A banked, wheeling turn and they were on the brief straight which led at right-angles on to the main concrete road, tree trunks rushing past and the undergrowth dense with dusk. Jon could see the thin line of the T-junction ahead and began to slow for it.

As he did so he was surprised to see Alan draw alongside and swerve ahead. He was travelling fast, over fifty miles an hour, and there wasn't much distance to the corner, but he could make it if he braked immediately. Jon pumped his own footpedal gently and waited for Alan to brake, waiting for the stop-lights to come on. They didn't come. The cream-and-black car drew quickly away, hurtling straight for the corner. It showed no sign of stopping.

Suddenly Jon remembered Alan's words at the stopover. "Haven't been that way before." He couldn't have seen the junction: it was hard to pick out unless you knew it was there.

He jabbed desperately at the horn. Ahead of him the speed-blurred M.G. was almost at the crossing. It was still travelling fast. His hand reached the horn-button.

It was too late. The twin stop-lights of the car ahead leapt alight. They stayed a brilliant flaming red. Then the car hit the junction, skidding sideways across the white highway.

Alan was leaning at a crazy angle across the cockpit, trying to straighten the car and wrest it round the corner. He was losing it, and Jon saw the machine slide heavily and stupidly across the asphalt and on to the loose gravel on the other side.

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There was an abrupt explosion. A dense cloud of dust erupted into the air. For an instant he could see the great red stop-lights shining frantically through the dust, and then he couldn't see anything.

Pam screamed. She had her hand over her mouth but the sound went through him like a shaft of pain. He changed down through the gears, drove fast and unthinkingly through the corner, and broadsided to a stop on the far side of the highway. He was out and running while the engine was still revving.

He plunged through the settling dust cloud and soon reached Alan's car. It was upside down with four black wheels stark in the air. One was still slowly turning. The bonnet and driving side had been crushed and chopped outwards.

Alan's girlfriend was sitting on the ground a few yards from the car. Her face was black with dirt and she was talking and weeping hysterically. There wasn't any blood on her.

He said, "Where's Alan?" but she didn't even look at him. She was gibbering and sobbing. He knelt beside her and ran his hands over her body. She seemed unhurt.

He got up and ran round to the other side of the car. There was only wet black dirt and petrol spilling from the car and the dark trees.

And then he saw him. He was stretched out full length on the dirt more than twenty yards from the car. Jon walked up to him. He was lying on his back with one arm flung across his body and his face to the sky. There was blood dribbling out of his ears and staining his red cravat, and his eyes were open.

Jon looked at him and felt nothing. He didn't feel sick and he didn't feel like crying. He just stood looking down at his friend who was dead, and all he could think were words which kept flopping over and over in his head.

You poor bastard. You poor bastard. One minute you're alive and the next you're dead. You poor bastard. A joke in bad taste.

© Craig McGregor 1961

Craig McGregor, 27-year-old Australian, has a suave, bearded appearance which looks as if it ought to go with gardenias, diplomatic bags, and lunch at the Ritz. In fact, after two years in London, he's had Britain in a big way (formal, joyless, he says) and is off back to Australia where there's no risk of being called "sir." His interests: tragedy, folk music, philosophy. If he would like the glove left in Argosy offices, will he please communicate.

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RIVER BOY

The air freshened and stars began to prick out overhead

BY JOAN AIKEN

THE river curled about in the narrow valley, dipping and plunging from rock to rock in miniature cascades, here sliding in deceptive silence over a flat shelf, there chuckling and whispering across a bed of pebbles.

Knee-deep in its coolness the boy strolled and stooped, selecting round, polished stones for his sling. They glittered an instant as he picked them out, drops flying from his fingers; then they dried in the fierce afternoon heat. The swift-running water arched against his legs, and when he skipped a rejected stone across the river it whirled downstream with the current.

A pouch in his leather kilt held the stones that he considered suitable; he wore no other clothes and his skin was tanned by sun to the identical pale brown of his hair so that on his neck it would have been impossible to tell where skin ended and hair began, save that the skin had a young, matt surface whereas the hair, from constant bleaching, wore a sort of silvery nimbus.

Presently the pouch was full and the boy made his way ashore, jumping from rock to rock, balancing himself with prehensile toes and outspread arms. The river ran between low, rocky walls; above them the short grass sloped in a smooth, cuplike curve to the cliffs that formed the sides of the valley, which was not much wider than a tennis court.

It was treeless; but ferns, heath, and berry bushes grew everywhere out of cracks in the rock, and the ground was covered with thyme, rockrose, and saxifrage. The boy flung himself down on this scented carpet and began to eat a piece of flat dough-cake, and to pull berries off the nearest bush.

Grasshoppers sang in the heat; there was no other sound.

When he had finished his meal he lay on his stomach, trailing a berry at the end of a long stem of grass over the surface of the water. But the day was too bright to catch any fish; they were all hanging in the wavering shadows of the rocks, or down against the mossed slopes of the waterfalls or hidden in clefts. And after a while the boy's head sank lower on his arms and he slept,

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while the sun moved over the sky and the shadows of the western cliff slowly began to lengthen across the valley.

After a couple of hours he began to stir, and suddenly he sat bolt upright with a look of disquiet.

There seemed nothing to cause alarm; the valley drowsed, golden and peaceful in the warm evening; only far overhead a couple of kites wheeled about the empty sky. The boy lay down again with his ear to the ground and his hands clasped over his head. His eyes narrowed as he heard a faraway thrumming like the patter of rain on oiled silk. It was the sound of hoofs.

He jumped up, went to the cliff-face, and began climbing it. He did not seem to hurry, but his ascent was swift; he gripped a ledge with his toes, thrust his fist into a vertical crack, clenched it, and almost ran up the sheer wall like a fly on a windowpane. Standing on a huge, flatiron-shaped rock at the top he gazed round, shading his eyes with both hands.

From this height the whole length of his little valley could easily be seen. It was no more than a crack in the land that spread in all directions as far as the eye travelled; a blond, rolling, upland country, now bleached pale brown by the savage midsummer sun. Nothing grew up there but the long, fine grass; and the rolling lines of the hills were broken only by sand-coloured rocks scattered here and there as if they had been dropped by giants. All around rose the far, blue, jagged peaks of mountains which, in the dry air, looked close at hand; but they were three days' journey away.

After a short while the boy tensed, as a tiny black patch no bigger than his hand appeared for a moment sliding over one of the straw-coloured ridges, and then sank from sight.

With a look of indecision he walked the few hundred yards along the cliff-edge to the lower end of the valley. Here the river, in the abrupt manner peculiar to limestone streams, plunged underground and vanished just before it reached what had once been a waterfall but was now a dry cleft in a precipice. Far below, the deserted watercourse began again and ran away down a bleached and barren valley for ten miles. At the lower end of this the tree-line started. There were a few dwarf rowans and ashes, and behind them lay a village.

It was called Pué, and the boy knew it well; he had lived there until his father had been stoned to death as a wizard and he had been driven out as a witch's brat to fend for himself in the dry uplands, which the villagers called the ter' sec'. He would probably have starved to death if he had not discovered the hidden valley. Nobody from below ever came up here.

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He wondered what sort of reception he would get if he went down with his news. Bad, probably. He had not been back by day for ten years, though he made occasional night raids to steal flour and oil. Presently, having decided against going down, he turned back the way he had come. If the menace to his valley was to be averted, he must do the job himself.

It was a real enough menace. The black cloud on the horizon was one of the herds of fierce little black mountain bulls which range at will over the uplands. In the spring the villagers catch and corral the heifers and calves, but the bulls are considered useless and are left to go free. Generally they stay on the western slopes of the mountains where the moisture-laden winds from the sea keep the grass fresh and long during the summer months, but this had been an exceptionally dry season and they must have been driven by hunger far from their usual haunts. The boy knew that if they came much farther they would soon scent the water in his little slip of an oasis, and once they came piling into it down the track at the upper end it would be completely devastated.

The herd might easily hold a hundred or more. His berry bushes, with their load of fruit, which he had intended to dry for winter, and his patches of root vegetables and grain would be reduced to muddy pulp by their countless needle-sharp hoofs; the stream would be fouled and the fish trampled and killed.

He glanced at the horizon. It would be several hours before they arrived and he let himself down the valley-wall again and went to work methodically, stowing away what he could; the strips of goats' meat and fish that he had spread out to dry on flat rocks were placed in his cave halfway up the rock-face, together with a few early ears of grain.

He considered his bees in their woven grass skep, but they were still actively humming about collecting nectar from the heath and rockrose, and he did not dare risk moving them; they would have to take their chance. Luckily he had already collected some of that season's honey and stored it in clay boxes at the back of the cave.

He stacked away his grass fishing-nets and few stone tools, wondered if it would be worth digging up some of the roots, and decided not to; they were not yet ripe and would only go rotten unless they were left in the ground until the frosts came.

All this had taken time; the sun had left the sky, which turned first green, then a deep tender blue with the pricking of a few stars. It was cold up here at night. He was exceptionally strong and tough, but normally if he were going to be out after dark he put on a leather jerkin. His present plan made that pointless.

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He climbed up to the head of the valley where a steep zigzag track—the path the bulls would come down—led up to the plateau. There was a roar of water, for here the river burst from a hole in the cliff and cataracted into the valley. By day it was a splendid sight, a clear green torrent of limestone water springing out of the whitish rock, but now there was nothing to be seen save a pale glimmer reflecting the early stars.

Presently the moon rose, and the boy was glad of it, for the waterfall drowned any other sound and he was uncertain how close the cattle had come. He went up to the top of the track and stared intently over the pale, rolling landscape. A moving darkness caught his eye; there they were, less than a mile off, coming along fast.

He ran down the path again, turned aside and plunged into the stream, ducking directly under the heart of the waterfall which now, under the moon, had become a spout of silver falling into a pool of curdled light.

There was room to stand behind the fall and it made a good hiding-place, drowning sound and smell. He knew that if the bulls caught wind of him too soon it would ruin his hopes, for they were wildly fierce, and the mere whiff of a human would send them stampeding up and down the valley; if he found himself in the path of such a stampede his life would not be worth the snap of a twig.

His kilt soon became soaked but he kept it on because of the pouch holding his sling and stones, and the tiny knife, the only one he possessed, tied by a thong to his waistband. Wound round his wrist and dangling in a coil was the lariat, a strong slender buckskin rope that he used for catching goats, and for dragging heavy loads up the cliff-face to his cave.

The wait seemed long but it was probably not more than ten or fifteen minutes; then suddenly and as it seemed silently the pool below the fall was filled with wedge-shaped black bodies, flicking tails, and tossing horns as the bulls drank and drank after their long, parching run over the waterless country.

The boy stood with every muscle tight, waiting for them to move. He knew that until they had drunk deep nothing short of a landslide would shift them, and he studied them through the sheets of spray, trying to decide which was the leader.

Finally a bull, slightly larger than the rest, began to nudge his way, swinging his head, towards the near bank, and seemed on the point of hoisting himself out and trotting on down the valley.

Quick as a flash the boy left his cover and ducked through the pool, keeping low in the water to minimise his scent. When he

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reached the large bull he flung his noose over the great triangular head and jerked tight, then vaulted on its back. Leaning forward he grabbed the wide, curving horns and wrenched them round to turn the bull's head back up the cliff path.

With a frantic bellow the astonished bull started forward and the boy was almost unseated; he dug his knees into the bony shoulders and pressed his feet against the bull's flank. The animal lurched out of the water on to the bank, and then bolted up the track, furiously shaking his head from side to side in an effort to dislodge this alien thing from his back.

The rest of the herd followed, snorting, rearing, lashing out wickedly with their horns. The boy was thankful for his short start and for the narrowness of the path which prevented their coming alongside; he wondered what would happen when they reached the top. On the steep track it was difficult not to slide back down the knobby ridge of the bull's spine, and as he did not want to check its pace by dragging on the horns he lay at full length pressing his bare feet tightly against its sides and gripping with every muscle in his body. He felt the sling-stones jerk out of his pouch but could not spare a hand to stop them.

When they were halfway up, a further commotion broke out in the herd behind, but he could not turn his head to see what was frightening them. They pressed up close and he could feel their animal warmth and steamy breath on his legs.

As the big bull staggered over the ridge at the top of the cliff the boy was ready, and jabbed swiftly twice with his knife into the rolling muscles above the shoulder, driving the animal to frenzy. Then, leaning far forward, he bit the bull's ear, sinking his teeth savagely through the fur to the skin. The bull threw himself into an earth-shaking trot, but he had paused for a moment and the herd had caught up and were milling about him.

The boy felt a sickening pain in his knee as a chance-tossed horn caught him and ripped flesh and muscle. Ducking his head he stabbed again with the knife and the goaded leader broke away from the others and pounded off across open country, the herd following him in a ragged, uneven line.

The boy shook himself into a more comfortable sitting position, wincing with the pain of his hurt leg, and then turned his head to see if most of the herd seemed to be behind. He thought they were, and was filled with satisfaction.

The first part of his plan had gone well; now it only remained to urge them far enough from the valley so that they would not be tempted to go back, and then somehow to separate the leader from the rest of the herd and escape from his savage mount. It would be difficult, handicapped as he was by his injured leg,

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but there was no sense in worrying about that yet; first he must get them several hours' run from the scent of grass and water.

The shaking of his body and the thunder of hoofs in his ears almost deafened him, but it seemed to him that there was still trouble in the herd behind. Looking back he saw the cause. A pair of luminous eyes glared greenly in his direction, very different from the little shining piglike red eyes of the bulls, and he realised that a puma or prairie-lion must have leapt on to the back of one of the bulls while they were climbing out of the valley—dropped from a rock above, very likely, and was now being carried along like himself, hanging with razor-sharp claws on the back of its terrified steed, intending to run the bull to death and then devour it.

Probably it had been shadowing the herd for days, waiting for an opportunity to get near.

The boy felt uneasy at this ferocious company, but there was nothing he could do about it, and very likely the puma would not trouble to attack him as long as it was satisfied with its present prey. He hoped that he would soon be able to break away from the main herd and leave the puma with them.

They galloped for a couple of hours, and the boy grew numb and tired from the heavy, shaking motion; all his bones felt stiff and bruised in their sockets, and his heavy, wet kilt hung round him in clammy folds. The night air of the ter' sec' was keen and dry, and his wound ached with cold. In spite of this his head several times dropped forward over the bull's neck and he recovered himself from sleep with an apprehensive jerk.

Night wore on, the sky began to pale. Presently the sun shot out of the eastern mountains, flaming rose and orange, for a short while dyeing the pale hills a strange, brilliant brick-red. Rousing himself the boy craned about to see if he recognised the country they were passing through, but it was beyond his farthest boundaries.

They had run down a great slope, crossed countless dry gullies, and were now inching across an endless expanse of the bleached, parched mesa. The boy shook himself wider awake and noticed with relief that most of the herd were drawing away westwards. Looping the lariat firmly over his bull's left horn he kept up a persistent, gentle tug to head him always to the east, and saw with satisfaction that the gap was widening between the herd and himself.

With one exception.

Pounding along to the east of them was another solitary bull which sometimes came between them and the rising sun, throwing a long, fantastic shadow over the sandy ground. The boy

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screwed up his eyes and squinted into the light, wondering why the other bull was such an odd shape; it seemed humped or deformed in some way. Then the truth struck him; it was the bull that was being ridden to death by the puma.

With heels, knife, and teeth the boy urged his mount into a staggering gallop, hoping to out-distance this complication, but the other bull came heavily after them, and now the boy could see the puma distinctly, crouched with its eyes glaring and claws buried deep in the black hide.

It became a horrible race. The boy's bull scented the puma and, uttering a bellow like the shriek of a saw, plunged on in a thudding, rolling gallop that seemed as if it would shake loose every bone in the boy's harassed body, but the other bull, desperate for companionship in its terror, managed to keep up with them. It was losing blood from several wounds and was frothing heavily; the boy began to hope that its strength would soon fail when, looking ahead, he saw a sight that made his heart sink.

In their frantic stampede the bulls had run straight against one of those strange limestone formations the villagers called empedes, which stretch for miles and are like a pavement of flat rocks; but a pavement made for giants, with paving-stones four or five feet across, and narrow gullies two or three feet wide between them. The spaces between the rocks are filled with fern, heath, and shrub, and the whole expanse looks as pretty as a rock-garden, but the boy felt despair as he saw it, and he tried in vain to wrench his bull round.

Now he understood why the rest of the herd had sheered off to the west; the wild cattle always avoid these empedes for, once among the rocks, they find it almost impossible to make their way out again and often become jammed in a narrow fissure and end up as a feast for the kites.

The boy's bull snorted and turned sideways but it was too late; they were already among the first rocks. He tried to steer his mount through the wider passages that would take them round and out of this terrible maze of stone, but it was hopeless; the bull panicked and plunged down recklessly. The boy had to draw his feet up out of danger, for the edges of the rocks were as square and sharp as if they had been cut by the stonemason's trowel.

In a few minutes they were completely wedged in a tiny gully. Its sides were no more than four feet high and the trapped bull stood there snorting and rolling his eyes, unable to turn or climb out.

Not ten yards away there was a savage bellowing and snarling.

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The second bull had been likewise brought to a standstill, and the puma had waited no longer to begin its feast.

The boy stood up, staggering as he tried to put his weight on the injured leg. It had stiffened during the long, cold night and he could hardly get his foot to the ground. A fierce pain shot up his leg and the blood began flowing again. He set his teeth and took a few more steps, experimentally; then he heard a threatening growl and, looking up, saw that the puma had left its meal and was moving in his direction.

His heart sank. He had hoped that he might get away while it fed, but he saw that was impossible. It would leave the bull to follow the new, moving prey, and with his hurt leg he could not possibly command enough speed to get away.

He sprang back to his own bull and flung himself alongside its back, keeping within the protection of its horns. No puma will attack a bull in the open, for the sweep of the horns can open it from chest to tail. As long as the bull lived and the boy could keep awake he was reasonably safe.

With a disappointed snarl the puma returned to its abandoned meal, but after a time curiosity and the hunting instinct returned, and it slunk back for another survey, prowling cautiously just out of reach, its head low, its eyes blazing and full of menace. The imprisoned bull flung its head furiously from side to side and bellowed terror and defiance. The boy shouted and let the sunlight flash along the blade of his knife. Presently the puma moved away to a little distance and sank down, its head on its paws, dozing. Once or twice the boy tried to creep away when it seemed to be sleeping, but each time it sprang up and he had to leap awkwardly back to the bull.

He began to despair, as the long, blisteringly hot day dragged on. He was faint and feverish from pain and hunger, and the bull's head was beginning to sag and its eyes to glaze; whereas the puma, fresh from its kill, fed and rested, was bright, fierce, and threatening. A couple of kites drifted down and began gorging on the second bull's carcass and the boy wondered uneasily how long it would be before they were picking *his* bones.

The puma hissed threateningly at the kites and they sheered off and dropped like plummets between the rocks.

Suddenly the boy had a wild flicker of hope. Could there possibly be a pot-hole there in the rock? He had come across a few such holes in his explorations—deep, dark chimneys that went down hundreds of feet to underground springs. The kites flew down to drink at these hidden waters, where no other living things could reach, and he had marvelled at their power to drop like stones and rise again almost vertically.

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If there was a pot-hole there he had a chance—a faint, unlikely one—of outwitting the puma. It was worth trying, anyway; better than the slow fight against exhaustion and thirst, with the final grisly death when he was too weak to defend himself.

He lay still, gathering up his strength; chewing dry, straw-like grass in an effort to lessen the torturing thirst. Then, cautiously, he stood up, loosened the lariat from the bull's horns, re-coiled it, and began to move slowly towards the spot where the kites had dropped.

Instantly the puma was on the alert and began to creep in his direction with its tail switching.

The boy inched his way backwards, hardly taking his eyes from those of the cat, feeling his way with his toes, sweating at the pain of his wounded leg. Every instinct cried out to him to run, but he knew that one rapid movement would bring the puma down on him; his only hope was to go slowly. He was terrified that he would stumble into one of the deep traps between the rocks, and every now and then he risked a glance behind for a second.

After ten minutes of this infinitesimally slow progress the boy took a chance; he picked up a fragment of rock and tossed it backwards over his shoulder. He heard it strike with a hollow echo and tinkle, and one of the kites flew up, croaking harshly and flapping its wings.

The puma paused, blinking, uncertain, and the boy's heart rose.

So there *was* a hole there.

Abandoning caution he turned and ran as fast as his leg would allow. A black gap yawned in front of him and he swung to the left and circled it, turning in time to see the puma come loping after him.

Now!

The lariat flashed snake-like across the mouth of the hole. Swift and true it noosed the puma's head, and with all his strength the boy jerked it, flinging himself backwards. The puma, yowling rage and alarm, braced itself on the lip of the hole for a second, and then disappeared twisting into the blackness below, its plunging weight dragging the rope from the boy's bleeding hand.

There was no sound from the hole; not the faintest splash or thud came back, and the boy, craning his neck over the edge, could see nothing but dark. The shaft looked as if it went down to infinity.

For a moment he reeled, giddy and sick. The swimming depth seemed ready to draw him down. He had just enough

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strength to turn and throw himself sideways into a deep, mossy crack between two rocks before he fainted.

When he came to himself it was evening. He felt chilly, bruised, and stiff, but the fever had left him. He chewed a few berries and then limped back towards the bull, knowing that by himself, with his hurt leg, he would never be able to achieve the long, long trek back to his own valley.

Was the bull still alive? Its head had dropped forward on to a patch of shrub, but as he came nearer it sprang up with a snort and glared at him in panic.

He would have to be gentle, very gentle. Luckily the bull was exhausted and bewildered by its cramping imprisonment in the full sun. He began speaking to it soothingly and, holding its eyes with his, he caught hold of the great horns and began to force it steadily backwards, checking the panicky swing of its head, never ceasing his soothing flow of talk.

Slowly, slowly, one step at a time, the bull backed along the narrow crevice until at last they came out on to open ground and the boy, snatching his opportunity before the bull realised its freedom, leapt once more on the broad, bony back.

There was no fight left in the bull, and no speed either. He ambled stiffly along at a slow walk, but the boy was content with that. They were, at least, going in the right direction. He spread himself along the bull's back in as comfortable a position as he could achieve.

The evening was silent. The rest of the herd had long since vanished into the foothills and nothing-else was moving on the wide upland. They breasted ridge after ridge, and gradually the air freshened and the stars began to prick out overhead.

Humming a tuneless song the boy turned his bull's head towards one star, especially large and bright, which gleamed and beckoned ahead and to the north. © Joan Aiken 1961

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MOUSE A LA CARTE?

I was fascinated by New York, terrified by the pace and noise, and lived first at a not very old-fashioned hotel, where they lodged you for a fixed price and threw breakfast in. And when I say "threw breakfast in" I mean threw breakfast in. It was done through a slot in the door and was enclosed in a large cardboard box. A friend of mine found a mouse in his.

PETER BULL, *I Know the Face, But . . .*

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PERSISTENT OFFENDER

By John Salt

DETECTIVE-SERGEANT Jack Manbre walked along Southampton Row in the early dusk of a damp October evening, a broad-shouldered, fresh-faced young man with a soft hat pushed back from his forehead and the skirts of his raincoat flapping loosely about him. He turned left down Theobalds Road and walked more slowly to the corner of a narrow cobbled lane. A decorative wrought-iron gate with the badge of a livery company on a plaque above the lock closed the lane to pedestrian traffic at this hour. Manbre craned his head forward and squinted through the gloom of the narrow entry. Finally he turned into the lane and walked up to the gate.

History had repeated itself, as Manbre had half suspected it might. The tall thin man in the torn black overcoat was there again, perambulating slowly round the court, staring upwards at the windowed walls of the offices that faced it on three sides. From time to time he left the path and walked on to the grass plot in the centre, standing there a moment swaying his head back and forth or peering round him on the grass, then returning to his lonely circuit.

Manbre tapped on the bars of the gate with a tobacco tin, then called crisply, "All right, chum, time to go home now, nip back over."

The man halted and twisted his long thin stalk of a neck to

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stare at the sergeant. He nodded solemnly, then came shuffling towards the gate. Manbre reached a hand up to steady him as he teetered on top of the railings, taking the man's full weight for a second as he dropped to the pavement outside.

He took the man's arm and said, not unkindly, "It's about time you packed this lark in, mate, because if you're not tired of it I am. Come on, let's see what they've got for tea at Holborn Central."

When his captive had been charged and safely deposited for the night, Manbre made purposefully for the door, to be hailed there by the voice of the station sergeant. "Job for you, Sergeant, Siddons Street; the Super's on the rampage."

Manbre said heavily, "I'm due off."

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The uniformed officer nodded cheerfully. "I don't know about you CID blokes, always miking. It's number twenty-three, rooming house, top floor."

"What's it all about?"

"Sudden death, I shouldn't wonder. They'll tell you."

Two police cars stood outside the house in Siddons Street but Manbre met the surgeon and a photographer leaving. He spoke to the uniformed constable inside the door. "What's on, George?"

"Somebody forgot to light the gas; you'll find the results upstairs. The Super's still there."

Manbre nodded and hurried up. A door stood open and a strong draught blew through it from open windows, but the air still smelt sickly. Superintendent Edward Rosewarne sat going through papers at an oldfashioned roll-top desk set in the right-hand corner of the room. Decently sheeted on a bed in the opposite corner lay the mortal remains of Patrick Troon, M.D.

Rosewarne looked up. "It's all over bar the shouting, Jack."

Manbre cocked an eye at the bed. "I can see that, sir. What brought you down here?"

"Tell you in a minute. Have a scout round meanwhile; there's a kitchen in the back might tell you something."

Manbre nodded and began to prowl about the room. A bowl of anemones stood on the table in uneasy companionship with an empty gin bottle and a smeared glass. Manbre opened the doors of a sideboard and found more empty bottles piled in their dozens. A wall cupboard disclosed the same contents, more bottles were pushed beneath another table and under the bed. He went into the kitchen, looked into the gas oven and poked around cupboards and shelves. When he came back Rosewarne had closed the desk and was packing papers into an attaché case.

He glanced at Manbre. "Find anything?"

Manbre said distastefully, "Bottles, and more bottles."

Rosewarne said absently, "That's always the problem, what to do with the empties. Knew an old girl once who used to wheel 'em out to a dump in a perambulator. Then one day somebody asked to see the baby."

Manbre looked again at the bed.

The Superintendent said quietly, "We'll be out of it in a moment. So will he, poor blighter."

"Did he put himself out?"

Rosewarne said firmly, "Wasn't the type. No, your memory goes after thirty-odd years on the hard stuff. He had a skinful, turned on the gas oven, and forgot he'd done it. Never knew a thing."

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Manbre said carefully, "Not your line of country, is it, sir?"

"No, it just so happens that I knew Patrick Troon, the deceased as they'll soon be calling him."

"Friend of yours, sir?"

"Hardly. No, he was a friend of a man called Bellarmin."

Rosewarne saw the worried look that Manbre shot at him and grinned sourly. "You've heard of Bellarmin, no doubt."

"The jeweller in Turl Court."

"The same—only to me the words fence, thug, and murderer spring more aptly to mind."

"It was never proved, sir," Manbre mumbled.

"Agreed," Rosewarne said levelly. "But I'm telling you that Bellarmin is a crook with a penchant for blackmail and violence. I pulled him in once. You know that, don't you?"

Manbre looked uncomfortable. "I heard something, sir."

"Too Irish you had. Well, no doubt you also heard that I couldn't make it stick. The judge slung the case out and I got a roasting from the Commissioner's office that cost me my next step up from D.D.I."

"You've got it now, sir," Manbre reminded him. "And they let you keep your old manor."

Rosewarne grinned suddenly. "Don't misunderstand me, Jack. I deserved all I got when I couldn't make it stick. No, what gripes me is that Bellarmin got away with murder, literally."

"The Carnsbeg case?"

Rosewarne nodded. "Robbery and murder in one of those big red brick mansions in Russell Square. It belonged to old Lord Carnsbeg. It made a good headline at the time. The old chap disturbed the thieves and got his head bashed in with a poker. They got away with a lot of loose stuff of no great value and a diamond necklace valued at over fifty thousand quid. It was a collector's piece, of course, and would have to be broken up before they could fence it. Anyway we never found it. But Bellarmin turned in the smaller pieces a couple of weeks later, claiming they'd been sold to him over the counter. All bluff, of course; he'd got the wind up. So I pinched him." He grimaced at the memory. "You know the rest."

"So you can't be absolutely certain Bellarmin was at the house?"

"I had a ton of evidence, Jack, though admittedly it was all circumstantial. Bellarmin had been after the Carnsbeg diamonds for years. But the real trouble was his alibi, and the bloke over there in the corner supplied that for him."

Manbre's eyes flicked towards the bed. "Troon?"

"The same. You can't prove a man guilty of murder when his

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doctor says he was in bed at the time recovering from a heart attack."

"You couldn't shake it?"

"Prosecuting counsel didn't even try."

"It could have been the truth," Manbre said doubtfully.

"It could have been, Jack, but it wasn't."

Manbre shifted his ground. "What about the other man? You spoke in the plural."

"Carnsbeg gasped out that much before he died. No, we never found him either. But it wasn't Troon, if that's what you're thinking."

The sergeant said musingly, "There was something else about that case, darned if I can remember it now."

Rosewarne stood up. "Well, perhaps this is hardly the place for reminiscence. Let's get some fresh air." The two men went out and closed the door on the dark room and its silent occupant.

Back at Holborn Central, Rosewarne emptied the contents of the attaché case on his desk. He glanced at the sergeant. "You don't have to hang around, Jack."

Manbre said resignedly, "Give me half."

An hour later the Superintendent looked up with a sigh. "Nothing here, Jack. I'll just bundle this lot up for the coroner. Get some coffee and sandwiches sent up, will you."

"Fetch 'em myself, sir."

But when the sergeant returned, Rosewarne still sat with the papers spread out before him. He said slowly, "I didn't expect this to be handed me on a plate, but I reckoned there might be some link with friend Bellarmin."

"You think he was putting the black on Troon?"

"Beyond a doubt. You see, Jack, Troon was by way of being a brilliant man. But that bottle of his got him into trouble. I'm not saying what because I don't know, but Bellarmin did. That's why there has to be a link somewhere." He drank some coffee. "Notice anything else at Troon's place?"

Manbre grinned. "You mean the touch of a woman's hand?"

"Just that: flowers on the table, a joint in the oven, vegetables already prepared. A man living the way Troon did wouldn't bother to look after himself like that."

Manbre shrugged. "He had a girlfriend maybe."

"Troon was sixty, and a bad life. No, he had something better than a girlfriend, Jack. He had a daughter." He pushed a postcard-size photograph towards Manbre. "I found that in the back of his desk."

Manbre studied the girl in the picture. She was in her early twenties, dark-haired with a broad, smooth brow and great dark

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eyes. Her mouth was soft and smiling with a deep dimple just above the left corner. Manbre said softly, "They only grow like that in Ireland." He turned the card over and read the pencilled message on the back. *I had this taken on my birthday, Dad. Take care of yourself. Kathleen.*

"Take care of yourself," Manbre murmured. "She didn't live with him, then?"

"No, she visited him on her holidays, I expect."

"We had better talk to her," Manbre said eagerly. "There'll be an address among his papers."

Rosewarne shook his head. "Troon's documented life ended thirty years ago. That photograph is the only recent thing among his effects. Whatever sort of life the fellow led, it wasn't the kind he cared about sufficiently to record."

"We'll pick her up," the sergeant said confidently.

"You can make a start tomorrow," Rosewarne told him.

"I'm due at Clerkenwell first thing."

Rosewarne groaned. "The way they waste a poor copper's time. What have you got?"

"A 'loitering with intent,' or that's what they call it."

"And what do you call it?"

Manbre frowned. "It's a queer one, sir. Seven times I've seen the beak with this fellow. Always the same charge: loitering on enclosed premises with intent to commit a felony. He's never actually committed one so far as I can see, but it's getting on everybody's nerves. You see it's always the same premises."

Rosewarne stirred irritably. "Where?"

"A lock-up court off Theobalds Road. It's closed every night as soon as the office staff go home. Then along comes this bloke and shins over the top, regular as clockwork."

"What happens then?"

Manbre's frown deepened. "Nothing. He squats down in the centre of the yard or prowls up and down it until somebody makes the pinch; usually me."

"That doesn't sound too accidental."

"It isn't. I found him the first time; then when it came to be a regular thing I got in the habit of dropping by on the off chance."

"Is he simple?"

"No doubt about that. Quite harmless though. They've got quite a big medical dossier on him but no personal background. He seems to have appeared out of the blue about fourteen months back. The doctors think he has been in a severe accident at some time which may have affected his mind; certainly something has affected his memory. Anyway he foxes the magistrates."

"What's his name?"

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"That's another mystery. He's known as Nicholson but that's only on the strength of something he mumbled when they collected him one night after being beaten up."

Rosewarne said testily, "You've got the cart before the horse again, Jack. What's this about a beating-up?"

"Well, that's how he first came to official notice. A copper found him collapsed on the Viaduct steps. He was badly cut about and bruised so they wheeled him off to Bart's. There they diagnosed a hairline skull fracture, not a result of the beating-up. After treatment the hospital took pity on him and found him a job as a general handyman.

"It was soon afterwards that I pinched him. The beak discharged him with a caution the first time. He went back to his job, stuck it for a week or two, then shinned over the wall again. It has been a regular pattern ever since. He's had probation, broken it twice, been inside a couple of times, and still come out and done the same thing all over again."

The Superintendent got up and walked to the wall map where the boundaries of his manor were marked off by bold red lines. He rested a hand over the area covering Russell Square and Southampton Row, then stepped back, regarding the map musingly. "I think he's looking for something," he said at last. "I think somebody else is looking for it too."

"Sorry, sir. I don't follow."

Rosewarne grinned. "I don't really expect you to. And it's no good looking at me sideways, Jack, I'm getting cautious in my old age. Feel like doing some checking?"

"What's the job?"

"Circularise all the hospitals and casualty stations in the London area. I want to know whether anybody like your queer fellow was treated for head injuries in the early hours of 26th November two years ago."

Manbre nodded, still mystified. "Could take weeks, sir," he warned. "Casualty staffs change all the time."

"You have three months, supposing your prediction to be correct," Rosewarne said crisply. "I'm off now; turn that file in before you go."

Manbre watched the door close behind him, then looked at the open file. The first entry was dated 25th November. Lord Carnsbeg had died on that day at a little before midnight.

Much of Manbre's life was spent in asking questions. He was used to the reply evasive and to the lie direct and he could deal successfully with either or both. But there are occasions in a policeman's life when no answer at all is to be had for the simple

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reason that the relevant information is lacking. Such was Manbre's experience after several weeks of intensive legwork, and he reported as much to his chief.

"I'll take odds that nobody answering Nicholson's description was treated in a London hospital that night."

"You'd probably win," Rosewarne said mildly. "But he was treated just the same."

Manbre's face fell. "How do you make that out, sir?"

"You missed a corner, Jack. I've been reading the court medical officer's report based on the findings at Bart's. Nicholson had a scar on the left temple that had been stitched comparatively recently, within the last two years, say. More than that, X-ray photos show two fractures in frontal ribs. He might have walked about with those for a couple of days, not longer. There was also a lung scar, consistent with pneumonia. The medical opinion is that he had received careful and reasonably expert nursing over a fairly long period to restore him even to the state in which you last saw him."

"But not in a hospital?"

"Not in a hospital, Jack, or they'd have isolated the skull fracture."

Manbre stared, realisation dawning. But before he could speak, Rosewarne said briskly, "Get your coat, we're going to meet a young lady at London Airport. Name of Connolly."

They stood an hour later on the windy roof of the arrivals lounge watching the Dublin plane come in to land. The passengers bundled down the steps and thinned out across the tarmac. An airport official stepped forward and spoke to a girl at the end of the line. Rosewarne touched the sergeant's arm. "Come along, Jack, they've fixed up a room for us behind Customs."

The girl was nervous and plainly on the defensive; she sat with hands clasped tightly in her lap, watching the policemen with worried eyes.

Rosewarne took her gently over the first few jumps.

"I expect you are wondering what all this is about?"

She nodded silently.

"I am Detective-Superintendent Rosewarne and this is Sergeant Manbre. I have arranged for you to come to London because I think you may be able to clear up a few things in connection with an investigation I am making. There is no need to be frightened or worried."

She said in a soft, rather husky voice, "I really don't know how I can help you."

Rosewarne took an envelope from his pocket and laid it on the

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table. The girl looked wonderingly at it, then back at Rosewarne.

He said quietly, " Your name is Connolly and you are a ward sister in Rathmines General Infirmary. Is that correct? "

" Yes, Superintendent, quite right."

" So you can't be Miss Kathleen Troon? "

The neatly gloved hands strained suddenly together but she remained calm. " No, that is not my name."

Rosewarne sighed. " Very well, Miss Connolly. Now would you mind opening that envelope and studying its contents."

She took off her gloves and laid them neatly on the table, then untucked the flap of the envelope and took out a photograph. She stared at the picture, then turned stricken eyes on the Superintendent. He took the postcard from her and put it back in the envelope.

" I was sorry to have to do that, Miss Troon. It was on your father's desk. When did you learn of his death? "

" Next day. Daddy was an important man once in his own country." She said it proudly and Manbre warmed to her.

" But you did not come back? "

She shook her head, dumbly.

" Why was that, now? "

She put her head back suddenly and flared at him. " Stop treating me like a child. There was nothing sinister in it. I didn't come because it was too late, there was nothing more I could do. And my name is Connolly. Mother and Daddy parted years ago and when the break came I went to live with her in Ireland and took her maiden name. She never knew I came back to see him sometimes and she was never meant to. Oh, if only I had stayed that day, just till he came in, it would never have happened." She began to cry quietly.

" Something like it was bound to happen one day. It wasn't your fault," Rosewarne said, and winced for the coldness of his comfort.

She blinked back her tears, making furious play with a scrap of handkerchief. Manbre leaned forward and gave her one of his own, still folded in the creases his landlady had lovingly ironed in the night before. She gave him a grateful little smile, then said indignantly to Rosewarne, " You surely didn't bring me from Dublin to talk about my father."

" No," Rosewarne agreed gravely. " I brought you to talk about your brother."

" That's easily answered then, for he's dead."

" You're sure of that? "

She nodded fiercely. " Of course. Daddy wrote to us in Dublin two years ago. He was run over and killed."

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" I'm sorry to ask you this, but was your brother ever in trouble? "

" In and out of it all his life," she said sadly. " I'm thinking that helped Daddy along with the bottle, but Mother says that it was the drinking that drove Con from home."

" Just so. Now tell me, please. Is this your brother? " He handed her a second picture. She peered at it, then said doubtfully, " I can't be sure, it's very like him but there's something wanting in the face."

Rosewarne's face remained impassive. The girl continued on a note of question, " It would have been taken a while back? "

" About three weeks."

" Then it can't be Con," she said firmly. " Will I be going home to Dublin now? "

" In a while," he promised. " But first I want you to come up to London with us. We shan't keep you long."

She tossed her head angrily. " It seems I don't have much choice."

The girl remained silent until they entered the long white-tiled exercise room of a London prison. Their feet rang hollowly on the stone floor and the level rays of the sinking sun shining through the high windows projected a pattern of barred frames along the opposite wall. Keys jangled and clashed in a lock and a door opened at the far end of the room. Nicholson entered, accompanied by a warder.

Rosewarne touched the girl's arm. " Go and speak to him," he said.

She walked away from them, a small and lonely figure, and approached Nicholson. Her soft voice came faintly to them but the words could not be distinguished. Nicholson remained in the attitude of his first appearance, head and shoulders down, arms hanging loosely, the tall body slumped in slack dejection. He did not answer the girl and after a moment or two longer the warder came forward and drew him away.

Kathleen watched him out of the room, then returned to the two policemen.

Very pale and strained now, she looked at Rosewarne through tear-blurred eyes. " It's Con, Superintendent, though I cannot understand how it can be or how you could have known."

" I didn't know," he told her gently. " It was a question of balancing probabilities. You see I had to know why your father was so frightened of a man called Nicholas Bellarmin."

" Bellarmin," she whispered, and swayed towards Manbre who fielded her neatly . . .

Twenty minutes later she sat in Rosewarne's office with a cup

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of tea before her on the corner of his desk. The Superintendent sat facing her, his grey eyes cold and intent. "Do you feel better?"

She nodded gratefully. "Yes, thank you."

"Good. Now tell me about Bellarmin and your father."

"I don't know much really."

"Just what you know then."

"I met him at Daddy's flat; he used to bring him drink." She shuddered suddenly.

"Did he bother you?" Manbre asked.

She nodded silently.

"What happened?"

"It wasn't that which troubled me. I am a nurse and I can take care of myself. It was Father; he didn't try to stop him or do anything. It was then I knew he was frightened. But it's no use asking me why, because I don't know."

Rosewarne felt again the thin shreds of proof slip through his fingers. He said urgently, "How often did you see your father?"

"Once a year since I reached sixteen and was earning."

"And you have stayed with him every year since then?"

She hesitated. "He asked me to stay away two years ago at the time Con was killed—" She stopped suddenly and put a hand to her mouth.

"But he wasn't killed, Kathleen. Which means that for some reason your father wanted you to stay away that year. Have you any idea why that should be?"

"I am sorry; none at all."

"Your father never confided in you, never mentioned his future plans? It is fair to tell you that we found nothing among his papers, apart from your photograph, to suggest that he had a family. All my information on yourself and your brother came from the Dublin archives. Did he ever give you anything—private papers, a will even—on your last visit to him?"

She said suddenly, "There was a notebook, but it'll not help you much."

"A notebook!"

The girl opened her bag, pulled out a small black leather book, and handed it to Rosewarne. "He gave it to me and told me to keep it safe."

"Have you read it?"

She shook her head. "I tried once but gave it up; half of it is in Latin and the rest is symbols and equations. Father was a man for puzzles; he used to try and teach Con and me."

Rosewarne skimmed through the pages, then shut the book.

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"Get that to Coding," he rapped at Manbre.

"Superintendent," she said, on a note of entreaty, "you must tell me what all this is about, and what's to become of Con."

Rosewarne sat back in his chair. "There's not a lot I can tell you at this stage. But as for your brother, he'll be released in two or three days' time and he is going to need help. So are we; will you cooperate with us?"

She nodded eagerly. "What do you want me to do?"

"First of all to stay in London; leave has been arranged for you at the Infirmary. When your brother comes out you are to meet him and take him to a flat which will be rented for you. You must leave the rest in our hands, I am afraid. There is one thing to remember: your brother is a wanderer—you must let him wander and not try to stop him. Do you understand?"

"No," she said honestly. "But I'll try to remember."

"Good girl. Sergeant Manbre will be keeping an eye open for you but from a respectful distance; it's rather important that a certain party should not connect you with the police."

"Mr. Bellarmin?"

"Mr. Bellarmin," he answered gravely.

She thanked him and went out.

"You and your respectful distances," Manbre growled.

"Keep your mind on the job," Rosewarne advised him severely. "As a start you can find out what's keeping them with Troon's notebook."

"Shouldn't think they've finished with it yet; looked Greek to me."

"I don't give a damn if it's Japanese. Find out what's happened to it, there's a good chap."

But in the finish it was Macrae, the divisional surgeon, rufous and shockheaded, who supplied the translation. "Code be damned!" he snorted, perching on the desk edge. "It's doctor's scrawl and pig Latin."

"So what does it say?"

The surgeon opened the book. "It's a case history, sort of medical diary. Damned interesting too; though I think the fellow had his prognosis wrong."

"Give me the facts, Tom, and spare the comment."

"Oh aye. Well, the facts are that Troon was trying to treat a man in his own home for broken ribs, a double dose of pneumonia, and what looks suspiciously like a skull fracture. Mind, he'd need X-rays to be certain of that, so I'll not blame him too much. Still, he was a fool to treat him out of hospital. Anyway he seems to have succeeded in curing the body, though certain

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entries suggest that he couldn't do the same for the mind."

Rosewarne leaned forward intently. "Does it identify the patient, Tom?"

Macrae looked thoughtful. "Not directly. There's a reference to the sorrows of parents and a tag from Terence—hinc illae lacrimae—hence came those tears. Could it be his son?"

"It could," Rosewarne said grimly. "No other names?"

"Sorry, that's all."

When the surgeon had gone Manbre bubbled over. "Is that the black Bellarmin had on Troon?"

"I think so," Rosewarne said grimly.

"Well, can you really tie the three of them in together—Bellarmin, Troon, and the boy?"

"Not with chapter and verse, but take a look at it this way. Conal Troon had a record of safebreaking in Dublin; you'll be interested to know that the fingerprints in the files over there tally with those of Nicholson. A man like that could be useful to Bellarmin and at some stage they came together, probably through Bellarmin's acquaintance with the elder Troon. It's my belief that they were together again in the Carnsbeg robbery.

"Apart from the success of the robbery, the Carnsbeg job was a shambles. They made the deuce of a racket and Lady Carnsbeg came down the stairs in time to see the killers scoot. A servant rushed to the window and saw the two men running in different directions. So they separated after the robbery. Are you with me so far?"

Manbre nodded doubtfully.

"Right. Well, remember that both men were in a complete panic. Bellarmin snatched up what he could of the small stuff but the chances were that the other man—let's say it was Troon—still had the necklace. That's more than probable because he was the safecracking expert and would have been likely to have his hand inside it when Carnsbeg blundered in. Now Troon was a smalltime crook, he'd no experience or record of violence, and he was a man on the run."

"So he planted the necklace?"

"Right, in the first dark place he could find. He'd hope to pick it up later of course, but he had to take a chance on that."

"Takes some believing when you remember what he looks like now," Manbre said.

"Agreed. So something else happened, some accident that prevented him from picking up the necklace but left behind some vestigial memory of where he had put it."

"The court off Theobalds Road?"

"I think so, yes."

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Manbre worried at it for a moment. "So you think he left there, then got run over."

Rosewarne shook his head. "Those buildings were still going up two years ago. The court would have been filled with builders' equipment, ladders, that sort of thing. I think he climbed a ladder, stowed the necklace away somewhere, then slipped and fell. In fact I can prove that a damaged ladder was found in that yard. As a result the contractor engaged a watchman. He started work on the night of the twenty-seventh. Work the dates out for yourself."

Manbre nodded. "All right, so Troon's injured, perhaps unconscious. What then?"

"He probably lay there in the rain for a couple of hours, then came to and dragged himself round to his father's place. Bellarmin would have been sweating blood all this time, wondering whether Troon had been picked up and whether he had talked. By morning he'd have remembered the boy's father and gone round there as well. That brings us pretty well up to date, I think."

Manbre said slowly, "So the elder Troon knew about the murder but couldn't talk because of the boy. What about Bellarmin?"

"Bellarmin was in the clear after the court case. I'd had my knuckles rapped and was right out of it, but Bellarmin still didn't have the thing he'd set out to get—the necklace. He must have sat hours by that bed trying to sweat the secret out of Troon; maybe he thought the boy was foxing.

"I think he tried an experiment: Con was allowed to leave the house and then was followed. That came to nothing, so then Bellarmin laid into him, tried to beat it out of him in fact. That was when he was found on the Viaduct steps and how he came to be called Nicholson.

"He was trying to get out the name of the man who had attacked him, Nicholas Bellarmin."

"It's all very plausible, sir, but it comes back to the same thing in the end. How do we prove it?"

Rosewarne said suddenly, "Think of a good squeaker, Jack."

Manbre's answer was prompt. "There's Stevie."

"Stevie, yes, the best there is. Right, Jack, prime him with the information that somebody is leaving chokey soon with a memory much improved, give him the address of Kathleen Troon and tell him the squeak is for Bellarmin."

On the eve of Con Troon's release the Superintendent talked to the prison alienist. "No change, I suppose?"

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The doctor shook his head. "Hard to say, but I have an idea his mind is not the blank that it was."

"Would this be a result of his sister's visit?"

"It certainly dates from that but you have to understand that there has been fairly considerable damage to the brain cavity."

"Does he remember anything?"

"I can't answer that. If he does he isn't confiding in anybody. But past experience of such injuries is that on recovery the patient will often try to complete the sequence of events up to the time of injury as though no break had occurred. My advice to you, Superintendent, since you obviously have a special interest in the case, is to watch your man very closely."

"I shall do that," Rosewarne assured him gravely. "It so happens that if this man recovers his memory he stands in a fair way to lose his life."

On the following day Manbre watched Kathleen Troon meet her brother at Charing Cross and later reported to Rosewarne that they had both arrived safely at an address in Bloomsbury.

"You think he'll try it tonight, Jack?"

"It's been the form so far."

"I hope you're right. I've got that yard cluttered up the way it was two years ago as a spur to memory but I can't hold the arrangement long."

"What about Bellarmin?"

"Pretty rattled by all accounts; he doesn't like the sister complication. If Troon walks he'll follow. We've a man watching the house. As soon as things start to happen he'll get on the blower to the box on the corner of Theobalds Road; the line will be kept clear." He glanced at his watch. "Time we got moving, Jack. We'll walk it through the back doubles; might as well keep warm while we can, it's liable to be a long wet wait."

Rosewarne clumped along in dour silence till they reached Kingsway, then he said quietly, "No mistakes tonight, Jack. I've had to take the Yard in on this one and they aren't too happy after the last fiasco."

Manbre said cheerfully, "The worst that can happen is that nobody will turn up."

Rosewarne shook his head. "You're wrong, you know, Jack. The worst that can happen is that somebody will get killed. Here we are anyway."

He slipped a passkey into the lock of the gate and turned it again after he and Manbre had gone through.

The night sky was overcast and a fine rain had begun to fall, but a faint diffusion of light from a bracket lamp outside in the lane showed the blurred outlines of building materials, bricks, a

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mortar mixer, and the long ladder that reared against one of the office blocks.

Besides Rosewarne and Manbre there were two other police officers concealed in the court. The Superintendent flicked on his flashlight for a split second to indicate that he and the sergeant were going to ground, then drew Manbre into a corner made by the brick stack.

At one o'clock the lamp in the lane went out. A dank silence descended on the yard, broken only by the distant rumble of trains into St. Pancras. An hour passed before the gate clicked and opened. Rosewarne hissed. A shadowy figure darted through and ducked down beside him. "Poulton just reported, sir. Troon left a few minutes ago."

"By himself?"

"No, Bellarmin came out of the house just afterwards. He was walking but he might pick up a car, of course."

Rosewarne cursed. "Out of the house, you say? What about the girl?"

"She's all right, sir. Poulton checked. She said Bellarmin turned up there this evening. He didn't tell her anything much but it was his idea that Troon should go out."

Rosewarne sighed his relief. "Give them twenty minutes then. Did you lock the gate?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good man. Get over to the wall there and keep low."

Manbre counted the minutes, picturing Troon's lonely journey through the rain-swept streets. When the approaching footsteps sounded in the lane outside he tensed at once, his muscles aching. The footsteps halted.

There was a gasping intake of breath and the scrabble of boots on iron. An ape-like shadow perched for a second, high up on the gate, then the boots thumped on stone.

Troon crashed about for a few moments more, barking himself against builders' lumber. Then he wandered into the centre of the yard, his head and thin neck silhouetted against the night sky, moving from side to side questingly. He saw the ladder and made towards it. The hidden men heard it grind on the pavement, then a rush and rumble as Troon telescoped the rungs.

He seemed not to care how much noise he made as he manhandled the ladder away from the building against which it had rested and staggered with it towards the façade opposite the gate. Again came the rattle of moving rungs, then a crash and the tinkle of falling shards as the ladder-head smashed through a window high up.

"He can't climb that," Manbre whispered.

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"The gate," Rosewarne hissed urgently. "Look at the gate."

Manbre switched his gaze. A bulky figure stood motionless in the entrance, its face a vague white blur. "Bellarmin?"

"I hope. Brought his own key with him, by the look of it."

Troon had begun to climb. For a while there was no sound but the clump and creak of booted feet from rung to rung, the slither of hands on wet wood, and Troon's laboured breath.

Troon continued to climb until he reached the overhang of a decorative parapet. He seemed to be leaning outwards now, with one arm reaching over the stonework. The ladder creaked suddenly as the climber's weight shifted. Manbre heard a grunt of effort, then the thud of boots again as Troon began to descend.

He came slowly and cautiously; two full minutes passed before he stood again on the flagstones.

Bellarmin came forward to the foot of the ladder. His strangely high-pitched voice carried incisively. "Give it to me, Conal, it is mine."

Rosewarne roared, "Now, Jack, let's have some lights."

Manbre flicked the switch beside him and a bank of small floods shone white light into the court. It cast two immense shadows on the wall behind the ladder, one of them gaunt and goat-like, that of Troon, the other gross and elephantine, that of Bellarmin. Of the men themselves, Bellarmin was first to recover. His right hand flashed to a pocket and came away as swiftly.

A fiery breeze fanned Manbre's cheek and his sight blurred redly. He put his hands to his eyes and staggered blindly. Rosewarne too paused in his stride and Bellarmin ducked beneath his outstretched arms. One constable put out a foot to trip the gunman but Bellarmin fired again, twisted in his run, and darted through the open gate. It clanged behind him and a key grated in the lock.

Rosewarne shouted furiously, "Five of us locked in our own trap. Open up, somebody, and quick about it."

Manbre felt himself shoved violently to one side, a skinny, agile figure gripped the bars and in a moment Troon was over the top. He thumped to the ground on the other side and they heard him pelt away down the alley.

Rosewarne cursed while a constable wrestled with the key; the gate swung wide and they plunged through, running hard for the street. Another report rang out as they reached it. A squad car stood empty at the entrance to the lane, its occupants having joined the chase towards Holborn. Manbre leaned dazedly against the car as the pursuit swept past him. There came a fourth and final shot and he staggered off in Rosewarne's wake.

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The chase had ended just short of High Holborn. The squad car men were lifting Troon to his feet; Bellarmin still lay face down on the pavement.

Rosewarne glanced up from him as Manbre approached. "You all right?"

The sergeant nodded. "What happened?"

"Set a thief to catch a thief, I reckon. Troon tackled Bellarmin low and brought him down. Then they tussled on the ground for this lot." He held out the sodden, blackened remains of a pocket handkerchief. In its grimy folds along with fragments of leaf and twig lay a string of graduated bluish-white stones with pendant chandelier-like attachment. Manbre took and tilted them in the beam of a flashlight.

He said dubiously, "Is that the famous necklace?"

"Well, even diamonds wouldn't look good after two years in a bird's nest," Rosewarne said judicially. "They would clean up of course, but not these. They probably looked good enough at the time and in the heat of the moment they fooled Bellarmin." He shouted suddenly. "Hey! Look out there, the man's falling."

Two of the uniformed men caught the wax-faced Troon and half carried him back to the squad car.

Manbre looked at his chief. "You mean they were never the real thing?"

Rosewarne shook his head. "Bellarmin killed for nothing. Carnsbeg had sold the originals secretly years before. It was suspected at the time and the insurance company made only a token payment to his widow. That was never made public though there was some gossip about it. It was the other odd thing about the Carnsbeg case that you couldn't remember and that Bellarmin never knew." He glanced down at the still-unconscious man on the pavement. "I'm going to enjoy breaking it to him," said Edward Rosewarne.

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SOLUTIONS to THINK AGAIN on page 21

1. *You also had forgotten your car and were walking.*
2. *The first, wouldn't you? Who ever heard of a Brazilian language? The language spoken in Brazil is Portuguese.*
3. *Both had answered* all *the questions correctly.*
4. *No reason to question it. You are leaving the hotel on New Year's morning after one night's stay.*
5. *Certainly—because they crawled through the pipe at different times.*

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From the first age the Theater hath bin,
Even like a trap to take faire wenches in.

OVID, *Art of Love*

This is the place for me, you know, thought Ted, following Marjorie along the greasy black stone corridors of the Theatre Royal, through the smell of make-up, and escaping gas, and lavatories. It's dirty and it's tatty and it stinks and I adore it.

She pushed open a narrow door, and there was the stage itself, the witch's cauldron for the moment off the boil. A rehearsal was in progress.

STELLA GIBBONS, *The Rich House*

Curtain Up

Sweet excitement of strings, and up like a trumpet note flies
the easy curtain
And Richard of England comes limping into the thick air
Of velvet and drums, crown and ermine and scarlet,
And the wanton flags licking like tongues the brilliant blue
bowl of the morning.

CHARLES CAUSLEY,
On Laurence Olivier's Richard III

Stage Fright

"I want a small one. Where's a little 'un?" His eye lit on Catherine. "Come here. What's your name?"

In a dream she told him.

"You're a child. You're playing up and down with a ball, see? Right." He waved her away.

On my very first day, she thought, I am given something special to do. She tried to remember a child bouncing a ball, steadily at first, then lurching out as it broke from the stones. Am I a boy or a girl? A boy would do it differently.

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"Just move about now," said Hollis to the company, "and make it as easy as you can."

Catherine said, though she had not intended to speak, "Am I a boy or a girl?" She had never heard so piercing a voice. The blush rose up her throat like water in a lock. She thought she would faint . . .

"What's that?"

"I said, please, am I a boy or a girl?"

He moved towards her, put his head on one side. "Well, Miss, didn't your mother ever tell you?"

She was speechless. The laughter heaved about her.

PAMELA HANSFORD JOHNSON, *Catherine Carter*

Old Vic

Can I forget those wicked lords
Their voices and their calves
The things they did upon those boards
And never did by halves?
The peasant, brave though lowly born,
Who constantly defied
Those wicked lords with utter scorn
Upon the Surrey side?

H. S. LEIGH, *Carols of Cockayne*

Young Orson

I pulled at my sword and discovered that it was stuck in the scabbard. Well, of course, it was stuck in the scabbard. On opening nights, that always happens. Theatreland lore tells of the little invisible man who goes backstage on every opening night and glues the swords into all the scabbards and short-circuits the telephones and jams a few doors. At last, in a voice which reverted to the warble of a boy's soprano, I cried shrilly, "Ring the cannons and fire all the bells."

The Orson Welles Sketch Book

The curtain falls, the play is played
The Beggar packs beside the Beau;
The Monarch troops, and troops the Maid;
The Thunder huddles with the Snow.
Where are the revellers high and low?
The clashing swords? The lover's call?
The dancers gleaming row on row?
Into the night go one and all.

W. E. HENLEY, *A Ballade of Dead Actors*

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Sin-Shifting

Occasionally a special train would be run to accommodate two or three large companies all moving across the country to various destinations. One Sunday afternoon I was leaning out of the carriage windows as our train very slowly passed through a small station in Yorkshire. As we came abreast of the ticket barrier an aged bearded porter glanced at the labels on the carriage windows and the long line of scenery trucks and said in a sepulchral voice to his younger companion: "Two loads of SIN!"

DONALD WOLFIT, *First Interval*

Make-up

His royal consort next consults her glass,
And out of twenty boxes culls a face.
The whitening first her ghastly look besmears,
All pale and wan the unfinished form appears,
Till on her cheeks the blushing purple glows,
And a false virgin modesty bestows:
Her ruddy lips the deep vermilion dyes,
Length to her brows the pencil's touch supplies,
And with black bending arches shades her eyes.

The Playhouse, 1703

Often referred to as the Gifted Amateur, Coates devoted a long and riotous life to proving he was another Garrick. He was not, but he was certainly as entertaining. He liked to play Shakespeare, and he designed his own costumes for Hamlet and Macbeth —as Romeo he appeared in a white feather hat, spangled cloak, and pantaloons. He wore these same costumes in public. Before appearing in a Shakespearean play, he would rewrite it to suit his talents. "I think I have improved upon it," he told his shocked friends. In *Romeo and Juliet* he improved the ending by trying to pry open Juliet's tomb with a crowbar. If he particularly enjoyed playing a scene, he would repeat the same scene three times in one evening as his audiences sat stupefied. He was probably the worst actor in the history of the legitimate theatre.

IRVING WALLACE, *The Square Pegs*

Exit, pursued by a bear.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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An ALFRED HITCHCOCK Choice . . .

The world's oldest motive

By LARRY M. HARRIS

SITTING in the quiet little bedroom of Flora's East-side apartment, Philip Devize breathed a little sigh and realised, with a small shock of surprise, that he was perfectly happy. A man of forty-three, he told himself judiciously, had no business feeling as free as air and as young as spring, but there it was; he felt wonderful. There was no use in denying it.

Of course, Flora herself had something to do with it—marvellous Flora, young, enthusiastic and beautiful. Who would have thought she'd have been so violently attracted to a middle-aged man? Philip hardly thought of himself as ageing, bald, or pot-bellied, but he had few illusions about his looks. At forty-three, dashing handsomeness was quite out of the picture, after all. Yet Flora had seen something in him, some quality that had caught and held her . . .

But Flora wasn't the answer. He'd spent evenings with Flora before, evenings when his wife thought he was working late or out of town, and he'd never felt quite so free, quite so happy.

He smiled to himself. The reason for his cheer was perfectly obvious, after all. It was the murder, of course.

Flora snuggled closer to him on the big red couch. "Penny," she said.

Philip blinked. "Oh, nothing," he said. "Nothing at all. Just thinking how—how happy I am. With you, and everything."

"I'm glad," Flora said throatily. "Tell me, darling. Do I make you very happy?"

"Of course you do," Philip said rather theatrically, and gathered her in his arms. Several seconds passed.

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" That's all I want," Flora said with a sigh. " To make you very happy."

Philip kissed her again. " Nothing else? "

" But, darling," Flora said, " I love you. What else could I want? "

Philip thought of his wife and grimaced. " Attention," he said. " Attention all the time, every fool minute. Clothes. Furs. Jewels. Why, Flora, do you only want to make me happy? "

" Because I love you," Flora said throatily.

" And I—I love you," Philip said. He folded her in his arms, feeling perfectly content, and thinking, with a tiny part of his mind, about the murder.

Philip had read too many detective stories to think that he could get away with killing his wife. In such cases, as he was well aware, it is the husband who is the first and usually the only suspect. And, given that initial suspicion, a well-equipped modern police force like the ones he'd read about would inevitably find evidence to back it up. Though Philip's wish to slough off his wife—like an old, outgrown skin—was strong, he had no concomitant desire to go to gaol or to the electric chair.

And then—it was wonderfully coincidental when he thought of it—he'd met Flora and Schustak, both at almost the same time.

Flora had come first. It had been in a bar, one not too far from his own apartment. She had come in and seen him there, and suddenly they were talking together. It had all seemed so natural . . . Then there had been more meetings, and at last he had gone to Flora's apartment, and that had really been the start.

He wondered just how far he would have allowed himself to go with Flora if he had not met Schustak in the meantime. He would probably have done all the same things, he reflected; after all, by the time he did meet Schustak, Flora knew all there was to know about him, from his boyhood right up to the marriage he'd have given anything to be rid of.

Naturally, she'd asked him about a possible divorce. But a divorce was out of the question, he knew; he told her so. His wife would never have agreed to such a thing; all her upbringing was against it, and besides—he told Flora, with a wry smile—she wasn't going to let go of a goldmine.

He had money; his family had been well-to-do for several generations, and Philip's father had increased their holdings until " fortune " was the only really right word. Perhaps Philip's wife had married him for money originally; he wouldn't have put it past her, he said. At any rate, divorce was impossible.

He never mentioned murder, of course. Not to Flora.

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Flora and murder just didn't go together. It wasn't exactly that she was innocent, but Philip didn't want to talk about anything unpleasant when he was with her. He wanted things to be perfect, as far as Flora was concerned.

And they were, or at least Flora said so. She kept her own apartment, refused gifts from him—lived her own life. "Only it's your life now, darling," she had said. "It belongs to you—because I belong to you."

The next morning, Schustak had come to his office.

"He says it's about a Miss Flora Arnold," Philip's secretary told him.

Philip went white, but managed to control himself. "Show him up," he said, and when Schustak walked in, thin, dapper, completely at ease with his small, precise movements, Philip said only, "Close the door."

Schustak said, "Of course," and did so. He sat down opposite Philip, across the desk.

Philip took a deep breath. "You mentioned Flora Arnold to my secretary," he said.

Schustak nodded, moving his head perhaps three-quarters of an inch. "Exactly," he said, and took out a gold cigarette case. He extracted a cigarette, lit it, put the case back, and went on, "I am sorry to cause you any discomfort. But it was the only sure way of being admitted to your private office without disclosing my real motives."

"I don't want Flora's name—Miss Arnold's name—used in—" Philip got that far and stopped. "Your real motives?" he said, in an entirely different voice. "Blackmail, I suppose." He shook his head. "You're out of luck, Mr. Schuman, or whatever your name is. I won't pay a cent."

"Schustak," Schustak said. "And I have no wish to blackmail you. On the contrary. I am here to do you a service."

Philip nodded. "Sure you are," he said bitterly. "You know about Flora, so you assume I want it kept quiet. Well—"

"Will you dismiss Miss Arnold from your mind?" Schustak said quietly. "I merely used her name to see you. I do not know the woman; I have never met her; I have no wish to meet her. My business has little, if any, connection with her. I am here to serve you."

Philip closed his eyes for a second. When he opened them, he still felt a little dizzy. "You don't know her," he said. "Then how do you know her name?"

"Because," Mr. Schustak said carefully, "I know you." He tapped his cigarette into Philip's desk ashtray, and went on, "Not in the personal sense, of course. But I know of your troubles

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with your—ah—wife. I know of your wish for a solution." He smiled very slightly. "I am here to offer that solution," he said.

"My wife," Philip said tightly, "is my own business. So is Fl— Miss Arnold. And I don't see what right you have to come barging in here and—"

"Right?" Schustak said. "But you invited me in." He raised a hand, forestalling Philip for a second. "And I must somehow make you believe me, Mr. Devize; I am interested only in helping you. I have a solution for your—ah—difficulty."

Philip grimaced. In spite of himself, he was beginning to believe the man. "There isn't any solution," he said.

"There is one," Schustak said carefully.

Philip blinked. The silence seemed to last for ever.

"Mr. Devize," Schustak said at last. "You read detective fiction."

"How do you know?" Philip asked.

Schustak shrugged. "I also know about Miss Arnold," he pointed out, "and about your wife. Our organisation is especially proud of its research branch."

"Organisation?" Philip said.

Schustak nodded. He pressed out his cigarette neatly. "Let me continue," he said quietly. "You read detective fiction. You have often, perhaps, seen references to some large combine which, for a fee, would—ah—eliminate a designated person."

"Murder, Incorporated," Philip said.

Schustak frowned. "By no means as crude as that. Let us say, simply, that we have a method—a quite undetectable method—of elimination. That method is at your disposal—for a fee."

"It's ridiculous," Philip said.

"Is it?" Schustak said. "And you have read about it so often? It is, in fact, a very old idea. Does it surprise you that it has been translated into reality?"

"But—"

"I understand," Schustak said. "You are—hesitant. Allow me to leave my card; you may ring me, of course, any business day. Our offices are open from half past nine until five." He took a wallet from his breast pocket, extracted a small white card, and put it on Philip's desk. He rose and went to the door.

"Wait a minute," Philip said suddenly.

Schustak turned slowly. "Yes?" he said.

"You mean—" Philip blinked. "You mean, for a fee, you'll undertake to—to murder my wife for me?"

"I?" Schustak said. "No, Mr. Devize. Naturally not. I am only a salesman. In this age of specialisation, Mr. Devize, we have found it wise to employ—specialists."

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"But I'll be suspected," Philip said. "They'll find out—they'll trace things back, find out I engaged you, and then—"

"'They' will do no such thing," Schustak said. "'They' will never realise that your wife was—ah—murdered. Our techniques are quite satisfactory."

"But—"

"Please ring me," Schustak said smoothly, "when you are ready to discuss matters more fully." The door opened, then closed.

Philip stared around at the empty room.

"Hoax," he said to himself—but, of course, he couldn't believe that. Schustak's proposition sounded more and more outrageous as the hours and days passed—but, of course, he couldn't pay any attention to that.

He had hope.

He talked everything over with Flora—cautiously, never giving her a hint of the real situation, telling it all to her as if it had happened to a friend. He felt proud of himself when he was through; she obviously didn't suspect he was telling her of a real situation, one which concerned him directly.

Her advice was just what he hoped it would be. "After all, this friend of yours couldn't lose anything by ringing up and asking more questions, could he? I mean, what harm could it do? And he could always stop things."

It was exactly what he was thinking himself. The next morning, after some preliminary hesitation, frightening and unexpected, he rang the number on Schustak's little white card, and made an appointment.

The office building was an old one, a little shabby. Philip took the lift to the tenth floor as Schustak had directed, and found Room 1012 quickly. There was no other lettering on the ground-glass door, and when he opened it he saw nothing inside but a single desk, and Mr. Schustak behind it.

"Our offices are, necessarily, modest," Mr. Schustak said, smiling. "We maintain more elaborate facilities—ah—out of town. Won't you be seated?"

Wordlessly, Philip sat down at a chair next to the desk.

"You understand, of course," Schustak said, "that we hardly want to draw attention to ourselves."

"Of course," Philip said absently. He'd read enough to know that. What did the man take him for? "I wanted to talk about this—this method of yours."

"Ah," Schustak said. He closed his eyes. "I'm afraid I can tell you very little about the actual method; it must remain our secret. You understand."

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"But—"

"Safety is guaranteed," Schustak said. "After all, were you to be—bothered in any way, we would also be exposed. Please realise that it is in our interest, as well as yours, to see that everything goes off smoothly."

"Of course," Philip said. "I'm—sorry. But it still seems to me that—"

"That you ought to know something?" Schustak said. "Quite rightly." He uttered a single name.

"You mean you—"

Schustak nodded, making it a full inch this time.

"But that was—a natural death," Philip said. "A heart attack."

Schustak nodded. "That was the coroner's report," he said. "You see, our method is really novel and quite undetectable."

Philip drew a long breath. It seemed to take some time for him to say, "You mentioned a fee last time."

Schustak frowned down at his desk for a second. At last he looked up. "Shall we say—ten thousand dollars?"

"Ten? Ten thousand—ridiculous!" Philip said. "I haven't—"

"Mr. Devize." The voice was suddenly cold. "Do you mistrust our research department? We know—we *know* how much money you have, how much is available. Ten thousand is rather modest."

Philip shook his head. "I won't pay out ten thousand dollars in advance—"

"Of course not," Schustak said. "But five thousand now, and another five thousand upon—ah—satisfactory completion."

"It's too much," Philip said emphatically.

Schustak looked back at the desk. "I'm sorry," he said. "Please don't—ah—slam the door when you leave."

"But—"

"We do not bargain," Schustak said coldly.

It hung in the balance for a full minute.

Then Philip said, "Do you want a cheque?"

Schustak almost smiled. "Cash," he said. "Bring it here this afternoon."

His voice was friendly again . . .

And now—now there was nothing to do but wait. Settled on the red couch with Flora in his arms, Philip smiled slowly. By the time he got home, his wife would be—eliminated. He would be free.

He thought about marriage again—and Flora. A slight frown crossed his face. It might not do to get tied up again, so soon after the—death. Besides, Flora wasn't the only woman who'd be

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happy to be seen with him. Not now, when he was free, rich . . .

She moved in his arms. "Darling," she said huskily, "don't you really think that you ought to be going?"

Philip hesitated, then nodded. "I suppose so. But I'll be back —tomorrow. And maybe I won't have to leave, ever again."

All the way home he drove without paying attention to the road. He must be grief-stricken, he knew. That didn't promise to be too tough; the only important thing was acting surprised and shocked—and that, he told himself, would be easy.

And then, afterwards . . . He smiled and let himself drift into reverie. Freedom—complete, absolute freedom. No more nagging, no more, "Why don't you ever pay attention to me?" No more—well, he thought, no more Mrs. Philip Devize.

When he reached home he had definitely decided against getting married again. Whistling, he opened the door of the flat. Where would she be? he wondered. In the living-room or the kitchen or in the bedroom? He let the door slam behind him and started forward. He reached out to turn on a light.

"Philip!"

It was her voice. She was alive.

And—he discovered rapidly—there had not even been an attempt on her life. She was exactly the same.

Schustak sighed. "By now," he said to the girl next to him, "it's over. He's home, and he knows. It's all over."

"But couldn't he—well, go to the police?" she said.

Schustak shook his head. "With what?" he said. "He hired somebody to kill his wife—and they didn't do it? No, we're safe. Of course, if she'd slipped in the bath or something, we could have claimed the credit and collected the other five thousand—but there's no sense in being greedy. And the office is closed—unavoidable overhead, I suppose, but it hurt to pay that first month's rent. We're gone, and he'll never find us."

"I think you're wonderful," she said.

"Wonderful?" Schustak said. "For this? Everything was easy—getting the information about him, making the pitch, stringing him, collecting. And getting out. Even the idea isn't a new one—just an adaptation of an old idea for the especial benefit of a man who reads detective stories. A very old idea."

"Well—I still think you're wonderful," she said, and snuggled close to him.

"Why, Flora!" Schustak said, without any real surprise, and embraced her.

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★ *Another ALFRED HITCHCOCK Choice next month*

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Dead keen to join the British Army the dauntless writer of this true tale hitchhiked ten thousand miles from Malaya to Catterick—earning his keep on the way by, among other things, selling his blood to hospitals. If ever a private sounded likely to have a general's baton in his knapsack, Signalman Oh is the boy . . .

One Man Went to Sign

By SIGNALMAN OH

I BELIEVED that to succeed in life one must be prepared to venture forth from the known, and face the unknown with determination. But to leave the life one knows so well and to chance one's future requires a strong sense of ambition, and a dissatisfaction with the present.

One day it occurred to me that all around me was changing ; my friends were leaving home either to study or start their own

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businesses elsewhere, and I had been left behind. I suddenly realised that I was no longer on equal terms with my friends, because I had failed myself. I had not worked hard while I was at school, and time and my friends had overtaken me. But I still had enough confidence in myself to start a new life, and I decided that this one should start in Great Britain in the British Army.

At that time I was working in a pharmacy as a salesman, and it was not easy for me to leave this job and find something new. But quite by chance, I read in a newspaper of a man who wanted a companion to hitchhike with him to Europe. I seized this opportunity and went to see the man, and we eventually agreed upon a plan. I left my job, and straight away made preparations for the long journey to Europe, and Great Britain.

The first stage of our journey was to be to India, and this we did by boat. The day before we left I went to say good-bye to my friends and relations, who wished me a good journey and future success—I hope their second wish bears more fruit than their first!—and before I knew where I was, I found myself on the boat looking back at the slowly receding shore of the " Pearl of the Orient." It was hard to see that white sandy beach, on which I used to lie and daydream, slipping away into the sea. It was harder still to watch my mother, gently crying as she waved me good-bye from the quayside, without giving way to my own emotions—and what shame is it if I did?

I began to feel homesick before the first stage of our journey was halfway through. The food and the whole atmosphere on the boat were both totally strange to me. However, things improved a bit as my companion and I made friends among the other passengers. One man, who had with him many fine examples of Oriental produce, was particularly pleasant; unfortunately he turned out to be a smuggler, and when we landed at Madras he was handcuffed and led smartly away. On that third day of August his journey ended—but ours had barely begun.

As soon as we left the harbour, we wasted no time in finding a place to sleep for the night. We eventually found an Indian Temple Inn where we could stay cheaply—it was reserved for travellers who could not afford a hotel. Mind you, it was not easy to sleep there, because it was full of bugs and other nameless insects which I am glad to say I was not able to see in the dark. I was bitten ceaselessly, and in fact I did not sleep at all that night. I was very glad when it was time to get up and start packing in preparation for our move to another town.

We left the Inn and stepped out into the streets of Madras. This in itself is an unpleasant experience, since streets and their

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occupants in this town seem to have a very low standard of hygiene. The people seem to work hard, but the level of wages is low and consequently so also is the standard of living.

From Madras we worked our way to Delhi, the capital of India. It took us five days to Delhi, and we stayed there for two days with friends from Malaya. From there we went by train to Karachi, capital of Pakistan, via the border town of Amritsar, where we spent a night sleeping in a train. We stayed some time in Karachi—longer in fact than we had intended—living for the first two weeks in a Cathedral and then moving into the Y.M.C.A. opposite President Ayub Khan's residence. In the Y.M.C.A. we met one British hitchhiker and two from the U.S.A.; and we exchanged stories with them and information about routes through countries which lay between us and Europe.

We discovered that we needed three visas—for Persia, Greece, and Turkey—which we duly obtained, and we were able at long last to resume our journey. We spent such a long time in Karachi because we were unable to find a satisfactory way of getting out of Pakistan. We tried many ways, including trying to get work on a ship going in our direction, but without success, and so we had no other alternative but to go by the longer and more difficult land routes. We left Karachi by train, heading north for Quetta, and settled down for a tedious journey through scrub land and semi-desert.

In Quetta we met an Argentinian who had hitchhiked from Japan, via Singapore and Malaya, and had covered much the same route as we ourselves. We all spent a night in a tourist lodge, for which we were charged nothing at all. Then the next day we hitched a lift by train to Zahidan in Persia. This too was a most unpleasant journey, because the weather was terrifically hot and at times, shut up in a railway carriage, almost unbearable. I made some friends on the train, and was lucky to be given, free, enough food to last me the day; I also got some fruit and some water, which helped to make me feel in much better health.

By the time we reached Zahidan it was beginning to get dark, so we spent the night sleeping in the train. Next day, still in company with the Argentinian, we set out for the next town on our route. We were fortunate to meet that day a Pakistani who was able to give us some advice about the journey to Tehran. We had thought of going via Isfahan, about two hundred miles south of Tehran, but on his advice we headed for a town called Meshed, in the north-east corner of Persia. There are not many trucks making this journey, and the only answer to our transport problem was to exchange our jackets for a lift on the bus. Our fellow passengers were mainly Persians, and they spent most of

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the four days which it took to reach Meshed in singing, not so much for our delight but to keep themselves awake. With a background of music, we worked out a little plan to get us from Meshed to Tehran—free.

As soon as we reached Meshed we put our plan into operation. Dodging the ticket collector, we got aboard an electric train bound for Tehran, and hid ourselves in the toilet. As soon as the train was under way we crept out from our hiding-place and, separating, moved down the train to find ourselves seats. The first one I settled in was soon claimed by another passenger, who I assumed had paid his fare, so I did not stop to argue with him but found a seat elsewhere.

It was two hours before the ticket inspector arrived at my compartment. I pretended not to understand what he wanted, but just kept showing him my map and pointing on it to my destination —Tehran. He soon got tired of trying to make me understand, and left me, but how long it would be before he came back and threw me off the train I didn't know. I was very much afraid that the next stop would be as far as I would get on that train.

When the next stop came and went without a sign of the inspector I breathed a long sigh of relief, and settled back in the corner of my compartment where I remained undisturbed for the next four hours. Then I was horrified to see the inspector appear again. He beckoned me and I followed him fearfully to another compartment where I was astonished to find my friends enjoying a meal. The inspector then very kindly gave me food too.

At last we reached Tehran: here we wanted to change for Tabriz, which is about as far from Tehran as Meshed. But to get on the other train we had to produce a ticket at the platform barrier, and we couldn't see a way to dodge the ticket inspector this time. But as we watched other people go through we saw that their tickets were blue, and this gave us an idea. We coloured a piece of paper with blue ink and joined the crowd at the gate: when we reached the inspector we made a great display of trying to get the piece of paper out of a pocket, and we were pushed on so as not to hold up others. On the train we followed the same routine of hiding and bluffing the ticket inspector and I was given food by other passengers. We reached Tabriz next morning.

Our next leg was to Mount Ararat, where Noah's Ark once came to rest. Not a very great distance but it proved difficult to cover because the roads are bad and there is little traffic on them. Slowly, very slowly, we hitched our way from Tabriz to Khoi, and from there to Banzangan, where we had trouble with the police before we managed to get our papers in order for entry to

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Turkey. We had to walk to Ararat, which took quite some time, and then another three days of hard walking to Erzurum, the nearest Turkish railway station.

At Erzurum we met a very kind and helpful young German who spoke English fluently: he even paid for our hotel. The next day we sold some of our possessions to pay for a train ticket to Istanbul.

At Istanbul my two friends had to leave me to go their own way. We had only five pounds left between us, and I let them have it all. Now I had not a penny in the world, but luck was with me: I met a Cypriot student who took me to a bus station from which one could travel to Edirne in Turkey. In the bus station I met a driver who was feeling unwell; I gave him a tablet to take and he soon felt better. He asked me for more tablets, and I asked him by signs if he would give me a lift to Edirne for ten tablets. He agreed to do this and gave me food and drink. On the bus I met a French family; they were very kind and spoke to me in English. At Edirne they gave me money for a hotel, but I saved it and slept in the bus.

From Edirne I hitchhiked to Alexandroupolis, Komotini, Xanthi, and Kavalla where I got stuck and had to sleep in a workshop. Next morning I walked a few miles and was then befriended by a ten-year-old Greek boy: he stopped a coach and persuaded the driver to take me to Thessaloniki, which is a beautiful town decorated with lovely girls and scenery. I got lost there and was helped by a policeman who let me stay at the police station that night. Next day I went to the British Embassy to try to get help for my journey, but they wanted to send me home so I did not go there again.

I now wanted to raise the money for a sea passage to Brindisi in Italy, and I was so desperate that I tried to sell the ring I still wear and which I greatly value; but I could not get enough for it. So I decided to hitchhike to Athens, but before starting I wrote home for some money, for I was now near starving. That evening as I started to walk out of Thessaloniki some people in a pub saw me and invited me in and gave me food and drink. When I left it was late at night and I felt rather lonely and downhearted as I set out again on my journey, but the barman came after me and took me to his home, where with great kindness and generosity he fed and sheltered me for a week. One day the police arrested me on suspicion, but when I was released one of the policemen gave me some money to buy food for my journey so I was able to set out again.

I hadn't walked far before I got a lift and reached Athens that

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night. I slept in a garden where I was terribly cold and hungry: I hope I never again pass such a night. Next day I walked to the post office hoping to find a letter from home, but was stunned to find nothing. I had a little of the policeman's money left, and with this I stayed a few days at a Youth Hostel. There a German hitchhiker told me that I might get a job in a vineyard in Corinth. I hitched there in one day for it was fairly easy to get lifts in Greece.

When I found the vineyard I seized some grapes and ate them for I was very hungry and I had never seen real grapes before. But when I found the owner, he said I was not strong enough for the work and he sent me away. I walked unhappily to a nearby fishing village, where a fisherman allowed me to sleep in his boat. Here I stayed for some days, and the fisherman collected money for me so that I could again stay at the Youth Hostel. While at the hostel I worked as part payment and sold my blood to a hospital to get money.

As I still had not got enough money to cross to Brindisi I went again to the British Embassy where the High Commissioner gave me ten pounds and an emergency passport to allow me to get to England: I am very grateful to him. I at last boarded a ship at Athens, and on the ship I made friends with an English doctor and his wife who were on holiday. They offered me a lift in their car all the way to London.

From Brindisi they sped through Italy, and with them I had the happiest part of my journey. They paid all my hotel bills and bought all my meals on the way. They showed me the very interesting historical buildings of Rome, and I discovered that the doctor's wife was an artist. We went through Switzerland where I saw and touched my first snow, and across France where we visited many lovely places including Rheims. Then on to a plane for England: I was now the happiest man alive, for it was my first flight.

In England the doctor and his wife gave me money, and addresses that might help me, took me to a tube station in London, and wished me good luck. I shall always be grateful to them for all they did.

I met a Malayan Chinese in the tube—a medical student—who let me stay with him. First thing next morning I went to the recruiting centre in Whitehall, but they said I must come back in four months. So I got a job and waited.

At last I was accepted for the Army and went to Catterick for training: my long journey was over. © Signalman Gin Oh 1961

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SEVEN LIES SOUTH

After making a safe landing Mike Beecher battles for his life in a blazing plane. Beecher, double-crossed by the attractive Laura Meadows, has been forced by Jimmy Lynch—at gunpoint—to pilot the plane to Africa. Lynch and Laura Meadows are working for "Don" Willie, ruthless former German

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By WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

Army officer. Beecher had been warned by the young Austrian, Ilse Sherman, that the job was dangerous—the plane carries evidence that could ruin Willie. Lynch, determined to destroy Beecher, attempts to fire the plane . . .

THE compartment filled slowly with smoke. Beecher hammered against the windows, but the glass had been fired to withstand the pressure of three-hundred-mile winds; he might have been pounding against steel walls.

Don Willie was back at the truck now, a foot poised on the running-board, and his head twisted to stare up at the cockpit. The smoke eddied and swirled against the windows, blurring and distorting Beecher's view. The German became a shimmering, bloated figure, and the truck itself shifted strangely in the curling tendrils of smoke.

In a marine fantasy, he saw the pale triangle of Laura's face gleaming behind the windscreen of the truck. She had moved forward for a better view, and when she raised her eyes to the cockpit he saw the impersonal excitement in her face, like that of a spectator at a road accident.

Beecher began to cough. He dropped to his knees and cupped his hands about his mouth and nose, desperately attempting to filter clear air through his fingers.

His coughing became convulsive; the smoke burnt his lungs. He had been prepared to die; his will had made that decision. To die suggested a clean break: the fall of a blade or the snap of a switch. But dying took time. Too much time . . .

He lunged blindly to his feet, pulled the bolt, and jerked the door open. Flames leapt up against his face.

Lynch was standing at the door in the middle of the plane, a gun in his hand.

Beecher saw this in a distorted flash as he ran through the fire with his arms wrapped about his head. There was the crack of the gun, a mean, spiteful noise in the roar of the blaze, but the bullet missed him; he felt nothing but flames searing the backs of his hands, and then the metal floor of the plane scraped his cheek as he tripped and crashed at Lynch's feet. He tried to rise; there was air in his lungs now, cool dry desert air.

As Beecher raised his head, Lynch's face was suddenly clear and distinct above the smoke.

"Damn you!" he cried. "I've got to, you know that!"

He raised the gun in his hand and swung it down across Beecher's

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temple. The effect of the blow was curiously delayed; Beecher felt the cold metal floor under his face again, saw Lynch's legs disappear against the calm sky, was aware of the heat and flame about his own body—he seemed to experience all of this the instant Lynch struck him. But after that diamond-bright cluster of sensation, there came the pain, the darkness, and the acceptance of death.

Someone had once told Beecher of a scientist who had had a dream of a universal formula which was the key to all the world's problems. Waking, the scientist had scribbled down the precious equation before falling back into contented sleep. In the morning, he had eagerly snatched up the pad from his bedside table. He had found this one sentence: The world smells vaguely of tinctured iodine.

Beecher thought about this; in some way it seemed to illuminate his own condition. He was breathing, so he must be alive; but the air he breathed was sharp with an acrid, virtuous odour, the worthy stench he had always associated with chemistry classes. His world smelt vaguely of tinctured iodine, and he took a confused comfort from that.

He didn't know whether he was sitting, standing, or lying flat on his face. Finally he opened his eyes. He was lying on his stomach, cheek resting on metal, and staring out of the doorway of the plane.

The noise of the fire had died away, but the ship was thick with a ropy, oily smoke.

There was motion beyond the range of his eyes; a draught stirred slowly, and the beads of moisture in the air sparkled in the sunlight. The curtains of smoke parted.

Beecher saw a pair of slender ankles swinging towards him. There was the tap of high heels, then the slight pressure of a knee against his shoulder.

He moved his head slightly and looked into Ilse's face. There were smudges on her forehead and cheeks, and her thick black hair was in disorder.

" The fire is out," she said. " I used the red can with the hose."

Beecher got unsteadily to his feet, with her hands at his elbow. He pulled away from her and braced himself in the open door of the plane. There was nothing but the desert beyond the shining ledge of black shale; the cacti stretched away like rows of rank cabbage, and everything was hot and motionless under the white sky.

Finally he turned and stared at Ilse. The interior of the ship was clearing, the smoke drifting in thick coils towards the draught at the open doorway.

Beecher caught her wrist.

" Why did they leave you here? "

" They didn't know I was on the plane. Stop it, Mike."

Beecher didn't believe her for an instant. " I want the truth," he said.

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She twisted desperately against him, but he tightened his grip until tears started suddenly in her eyes.

"They left you here," he said. "Are they coming back?"

"I don't know! I tried to keep you out of it."

"You knew all along what Don Willie was planning?"

"Yes! Yes! I couldn't go to the police. I couldn't hurt him. But I tried to save you, to keep you out of it."

Beecher released her. She sat down on the arm of a charred seat and began to cry. "I hate to give you this satisfaction," she said weakly. Beecher took out his cigarettes and lit one.

"Let's have your story," he said.

"I knew Don Willie was stealing this plane." She pressed her fingers to her temples. "He and Lynch talked about it. I heard them. Then I learnt they could not use Maurice, the French pilot. They talked about you."

She shook her head quickly. "I thought I could save you without hurting Don Willie. I went to your villa for cigarettes. I tried to say things that might make you think the job was not good. But it was no use. Then I went to the police constable, Don Julio, and told him lies about your being in the black market. I thought he would arrest you, hold you in Miramar until the plane was gone. But it made me too ashamed. I could not go on lying. Last night I left for Madrid in Don Willie's car. But I couldn't run away. I came back and left the car at The Black Dove. I took a cab to the airport. You were all inside. The plane was standing alone in the darkness. I climbed into the baggage compartment."

"Good God!" he said sharply.

"What is it?"

Beecher looked up and down the length of the plane. Thin trails of smoke stirred innocently in the air. The door of the baggage compartment was open; this space was empty, he saw, except for a few sacks of mail. Beecher had felt that nothing but selfish concerns could ever touch him again. But he remembered the dark-haired pilots who had been at the controls, and he knew they were dead.

The knowledge made him feel weak and sick. It must have happened while Laura was sitting beside him at the co-pilot's control column. He remembered the sudden drastic lurch of the plane; Lynch must have got the hatch open and pushed both men out—into the sea.

"Go on with your story," he said hoarsely.

"No one saw me. The baggage compartment was full of boxes and mailbags. I hid in the back. I thought I could talk to Don Willie when the plane landed. But I was afraid. I stayed hidden. I didn't think they would all go. But the blaze started, and they went away in the truck. I took the fire thing . . ." She shrugged wearily. "I don't remember what you call it. I put out the fire."

"And you did this for me? Just to save poor stupid old Mike Beecher's neck?"

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"I didn't want you to be killed. You or any other innocent man." She looked bitterly at the mark of his hand on her wrist. "It wasn't personal."

The emergency ladder was hooked to the threshold of the doorway. Beecher climbed down to the ground. He walked round the plane and studied the props, the engines, and tail assembly.

There were stones the size of coconuts wedged in front of the tyres. He kicked them out of the way and checked the landing gear. The plane might still fly; if the fire hadn't burnt out the electrical system, he could probably get it into the air. But there was damn little fuel left. And when the fuel ran out, they would be no better off than they were now.

Beecher became aware of thirst; the dryness in his throat was sharpening in the hot, dry air. Then he remembered the bright flash he had seen below them as they flew south from Goulimine. Trees circling a bowl-shaped depression, and a gleam. It might be shale or lime rock, he knew, but trees were evidence of water somewhere in the area.

How far back was that little oasis? With just twenty minutes of flying time, there wouldn't be any tolerance for errors. He'd have to hit it like an arrow. But Lynch had given him only one bearing out of Goulimine, and it would be simple to turn that bearing round 180° and fly back to the oasis. How close he'd get would depend on fuel.

Beecher climbed into the cockpit of the plane, tested the control column and then the electrical system. If he could get the plane into the air, if he found water, if he could make it to Goulimine in some manner . . .

Ilse came to the door of the cockpit and watched him with a curious little frown. Beecher said, "I'm going to try to get this crate into the air. You want to come along?"

"What choice have I?"

"You can stay here."

"I'd rather crash in the plane than die of thirst."

"We aren't going to crash," Beecher said. "I'm due for some luck about now."

Beecher started the port engine, flipping on the master switch and booster, and throwing on both magnetos. The starboard engine caught with a roar, and he swung the ship round. The plane swept across the smooth flat shale. Beecher felt the plane straining to fly; he pulled the control back slowly and smiled as the ground fell away.

Flying over the ring of trees in the early morning light, Beecher judged the entrance to the bowl-shaped depression to be ten or fifteen yards wide. Fortunately, this estimate was quite a bit out. There was enough room to clear the wings of his plane and, beyond this opening, a smooth stretch of ground sloped gradually to a small green lake.

Beecher bellied the plane in, with metal shrieking ominously

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against sand and shale; it was all he could do, for the seemingly flat area in front of the depression was pitted with stones which would have slashed his tyres to ribbons. As the plane came to a giddy, swaying stop, Beecher knew it had made its last flight; a wing tip was ground into the stony earth, and the metal ribbing of the fuselage had been torn and twisted by the pressure of the straining wing.

Beecher and Ilse sat on a ledge of rock beside the water. They had said little since scrambling from the plane.

The wind and sand had made a tangle of Ilse's thick black hair. Occasionally she raised a hand to push a strand of it from her eyes.

"Have we got any chance?" she asked, without looking at him.

"They'll find us. Don't worry." Beecher got to his feet. "We'll have something to eat and rest in the plane until the sun cools off. Then we'll lay out distress markers."

They ate one sandwich each, and finished the flask of coffee, and then while Ilse put the food away, Beecher made a double bed on the floor with blankets and pillows he found in the luggage racks above the seats. He lay down and was soon asleep.

He was awakened by a soft, choking noise which penetrated the rushing sound of the wind outside the plane. He turned on his back and rubbed his eyes.

Ilse was sitting crosslegged on the blankets. She was crying. This was what had waked him, the sound of her smothered sobs.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

She brushed tears from her cheeks with the back of her hand, an awkward, childish gesture. "If we are found, it will destroy him. Isn't that true?"

"Don Willie? You're damn right it will." He felt a sudden anger at her tears. "He's responsible for killing three men. Why don't you cry for them?"

"I can't bear for him to be hurt."

"Lie down," he said. In spite of his anger, he was touched by her misery. "Tell me about Don Willie," he said.

"You don't care," she said, shaking her head. "You don't care about anything."

"I'll listen."

"He lived with my family during the war," she said at last, in a voice so low that he had to lean forward to hear her. "In Austria many families had German soldiers living with them. He was like a mountain or a raging torrent, too powerful to need help from anyone."

She was no longer crying; her voice was weary and as devoid of emotion as the ticking of a metronome. "He ate alone in our dining-room. Sometimes I peeked in the door at him. He would laugh and call to my mother in the kitchen, saying jokes about the food. His voice made the dishes jump round the table. I was afraid, but I had to watch him. Do you understand?"

"You were a child then," Beecher said.

"It doesn't matter," she said, shaking her head. "Sometimes

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he was kind to us. He would sit by the fire, very jolly and pink. When he was in this spirit, he would put my sister and me on his knees and give us bites of his cakes. He told us that we were his little family."

"Your father must have wanted to strangle him," Beecher said.

"No, no," she said, and shook her head quickly. "He saved my father's life. Many times."

"How was that?"

"My grandmother was Jewish," Ilse said. "She was my father's mother. She died when I was very young, three or four. All I remember was that she was short and fat and used to sit with me in the garden under a pear tree." Ilse shook her head slowly, and tears started again in her eyes. "My father owned a small business. He sold coal and wood. Our home was near the church, with a drive and a garden. Everyone was our friends. But when the Germans came, they brought sickness and fear. People envied my father; they were bitter because they owed him money. They began to whisper about his Jewish mother.

"Only Don Willie stood between my father and the German commandant. Every day was cold and heavy with fear," she said, barely whispering the words. "The Germans made lists of people who would be taken away. Don Willie tried to keep my father's name from the lists. Sometimes he would say it was hopeless. My father must go. Nothing more could be done. But there were nights when it was better, when Don Willie had persuaded the commandant to take my father's name from a list. Then Don Willie would laugh and pat my mother's shoulders and tease her about the food, like the old days."

Beecher was swept with weary disgust. "Don't you understand what he was doing? He tortured you until you were half crazy, then relieved the pain a little so you'd thank him for it."

"But we begged him to help us. I sat on his lap and hugged him. I pleaded with him to save my father. And he was gentle with me and swore he would never let them take him away. He was my only strength and comfort. I can't cut this feeling out."

"When did you meet Don Willie again?"

"He wrote to me from Spain. I was at school. He said he was sick, with no money or friends. He wrote every week. I couldn't help myself. I wrote back to him. When my father died, Don Willie wrote and told me to come to him."

She was silent then, breathing slowly, a hand covering her eyes. She was asleep. Tears had dried on her cheeks.

Beecher turned on his back and arranged the blankets to give both of them as much comfort as possible. Then he drifted down into sleep. When he woke, it was four o'clock. They had been asleep since before noon. Then, reaching for a cigarette, he heard a voice calling from somewhere outside the plane.

For an instant, he was too stunned to move; then he shook Ilse's shoulder urgently.

"Someone's found us. They're outside."

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The voice sounded again as Beecher pushed open the door. Only the first rung of the emergency ladder was visible; the wind had blown three feet of sand against the sides of the plane. But the sun was brilliant now, and waves of heat and light shimmered in the clear air. Beecher jumped down from the ship and waded through the bank of fine sand. When he came to clear ground, he broke into a stumbling run.

He shouted when he saw them, not words of meaning or coherence, but simply a great yell of relief and excitement. They were about twenty yards from the tail assembly of the plane, standing together in the sand; but when he recognised them the shouts died in his throat, and a shock like an electric charge streaked through his body. He came to an abrupt stop, and watched them with narrowing eyes.

Laura's blonde hair was a gritty tangle of sand and sweat, and her face was swollen and flushed from the sun and heat. The knees of her overalls were stained and crusted with blood. Lynch sagged against her, holding himself up with an arm about her shoulders. He was barely conscious; one of his eyes glittered wildly but blankly, like that of a stallion trapped in a fire.

Beecher heard Ilse's footsteps behind him and felt the sudden pressure of her fingers on his arm.

"Please!" Laura said, staring desperately at him.

"What happened?" Beecher said.

"The truck went over a bank. It fell twenty feet." Tears started from her swollen eyes and streaked the dirt on her cheeks. "Jimmy's hurt."

"Where are the others?"

"Bruno is dead," Laura cried hysterically. "So is Don Willie."

Lynch had slipped to his knees. He swayed there an instant, then pitched slowly forward, and when he fell and rolled to his side, Beecher saw the hideous burns that flamed against his face and throat.

With Ilse's help, Beecher carried Lynch up the ladder into the plane and stretched him out on the floor.

He sent Ilse for water and covered Lynch with blankets. He opened the first-aid kit and looked through it. There was penicillin and sulfa powder, thermometers and scissors, rolls of tape and gauze, and a rack of hypodermic syringes. He rolled back the sleeve of Lynch's overalls, removed the sheaths from four syringes, and squeezed morphine into the ropy muscles of Lynch's bicep. It seemed useless to worry about the effects of an overdose; the thing was to cut the pain as quickly as possible.

Ilse came back with water in paper cups she had got from the lavatory. Beecher pulverised penicillin tablets and stirred them into a cup. He moistened Lynch's lips and let the water trickle into his mouth. Then he cut the overalls away from his throat and shoulder and looked at his burns. They were vivid and ghastly. With the edge of a wet handkerchief he cleaned away

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the sand and grime, then dusted the burnt areas with some sulfa powder.

Beecher turned to Laura. In the dim light of the plane her eyes seemed enormous. "What's going to happen to us?" she said weakly.

"They'll find us. They'll take us back to Spain." He glanced at Lynch's sharp, waxy profile. "Not him, unless they hurry. But that's a break of sorts. They still use the garrotte in Spain, I believe."

She cried, "You know I've been through hell. What more do you want from me?"

And while Beecher was looking after Lynch in the plane, she told them what had happened.

The Land-Rover had gone over a ridge of lava about five miles from the C-47. Bruno, the driver, had lost the road in the sandstorm, and they crashed twenty feet down a rocky escarpment. Lynch had been scalded by fuel exploding from the jerry-cans strapped to the side of the Land-Rover. Bruno's skull had been fractured, but Don Willie had died more spectacularly, thrown clear at first, and then crushed by the rolling vehicle.

Laura had escaped with a strained shoulder and gashed knees.

The truck had landed upright, and the fuel in the cans had burnt out without setting off the tanks. She had helped Lynch into the rear of the truck, and had managed to drive it back to the road. There was nothing to do but return to the C-47. She didn't know where Don Willie had landed his plane. Finding the C-47 gone, she had followed the tracks of its take-off into the desert. The Land-Rover had broken down after twenty miles, and they had covered the last miles on foot.

Laura's overalls were glued to the hardened blood about her knees. Beecher cut through the fabric, while Ilse opened the buckles which held the trousers closely round her ankles. Laura screamed when they eased them from her legs.

Beecher held her until she stopped struggling and had begun to cry weakly. Then he cleaned the cuts with water, dusted them with sulfa powder. Ilse had prepared strips of gauze and tape. Beecher bandaged Laura's knees, while Ilse went to get more water.

"Jimmy's going to die here, isn't he?" Laura asked him then.

"Maybe we all will. Where were you two heading?"

"We planned to drive down to Dakar. Jimmy had some scheme about going into the interior and working with native politicians."

"And Bruno and Don Willie would fly back to Miramar. Was that it?"

"Yes." She sighed and touched the bandages on her knees.

"Better luck next time," he said dryly.

"Listen to me, Mike." She sat up suddenly and caught his hand. "Give me a chance. No one need know I was in on it. Don Willie and Bruno are dead. And Jimmy's dying. What's the good of making me pay for their stupid mistakes? Please give me a break. I'll do anything for you, I swear it. I'll make you

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forget everything that's happened." She clung frantically to his hand. " Please, Mike."

Beecher pulled his hand free. " Save it," he said, and walked to the clearing . . .

At dawn Lynch regained consciousness. His eyes were clear and his fever had diminished, but when he tried to speak, a spasm of pain contorted his face. His breathing suddenly became harsh and rapid. Beecher moistened his lips and gave him morphine.

Lynch's eyes blazed pitifully, but he didn't seem to recognise Beecher. After a few minutes his clenched hands fell open, lay limp and still on the blankets. Beecher waited until his breathing was steady again before giving him more water and penicillin.

Beecher and Ilse worked until noon, laying out a distress marker. They used stones to construct a long arrow in front of the tiny oasis. The sun beat at them like an iron hammer, and their fingertips were scraped raw by the stones.

Beecher went wearily into the plane. Lynch was still unconscious, and Laura was sleeping in one of the seats. She had put on shorts and a white blouse. Her hair was damp and clean, and her calm face glowed with cream. She was like a cat, he thought, indifferent to anything but her own comfort.

Lynch's eyes fluttered open as the shadows deepened in the plane. He seemed in better shape; his skin had lost the flushed, feverish look. A glitter of amusement touched his eyes when he recognised Beecher.

" Classic turnabout, eh? " he said in a dry, whispering voice. " Treated you shabbily, and now you're playing the ministering angel."

" Where did you leave the Land-Rover? "

" A few miles south of here. But it's done for, I'm afraid."

Beecher was lighting a cigarette when Ilse called to him from outside the plane. He was so startled by the urgency in her voice that he dropped his cigarette and leapt to the doorway. Laura had gone to sit in the shade beside the water, he had a glimpse of her as he went down the ladder, an incongruous flash of gold hair and white limbs through the palm trees.

Beecher ran round the tail section of the plane and saw Ilse standing in the mouth of the clearing, staring out at the desert.

" Look! " she cried softly.

They were less than a hundred yards away: two men on rhythmically swaying camels, the hooded heads of the riders outlined starkly against the clear evening sky.

They came towards them at a deliberate, rolling gait, the garments of the men and the hides of the animals merging in tawny unison, making them almost invisible against the beige and silver tones of the desert.

The riders stopped a dozen yards from them and looked over their heads to the plane. There was no interest or curiosity in their dark faces, no glint of excitement in their eyes. They might have been looking at the rocks in the desert. The camels twisted their

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ugly heads about in the air, like haughty females sneering at social inferiors, and their wooden saddles and leather packs creaked faintly in the silence. The men wore djelabs of dusty brown wool, sacklike garments which made shapeless lumps of their bodies.

Beecher spoke to them in English and Spanish, but got no response. He did no better with sign language. The riders looked down without expression on Ilse and Beecher. Then one turned in his saddle and swung his arm towards the south. He tapped his chest and indicated his companion with a nod; the meaning of his gestures was coldly final. They were travelling south, heading away from Goulimine.

"See, they won't help us," Ilse said bitterly. "They're going on."

"I don't think we can stop them."

"But I have money," Ilse said. "Ten thousand pesetas, and a thousand American dollars in traveller's cheques. They understand money, don't they?"

"It's worth trying."

Ilse ran back to the plane, but in a moment she appeared in the doorway and called to Beecher, "I can't find my handbag. Have you seen it?"

The Arabs had made no move to leave; they waited with an air of eternal resignation, inanimate in their wooden saddles, bodies moving reflexively to the irritable shiftings and twitchings of their mounts. Beecher ran back to the plane. Ilse was close to tears. She had looked under the charred seats, in the baggage and pilot's compartments. Beecher shook out the blankets, turned the mail sacks over, and searched the racks above the seats. Then Ilse remembered that she had taken the bag with her to the pool.

"It's there, it must be there," she said.

They climbed from the plane, and Ilse ran back into the clearing. Beecher walked round the tail assembly, moving slowly and supporting himself with a hand against the side of the plane. It was cooler now, and gentle shadows moved along the ground. But his face felt hot and flushed. He knew he was weak from lack of food and drained by these alternate surges of despair and hope.

Then he shook his head sharply and rubbed the sweat from his eyes. The riders were gone.

Laura stood in the mouth of the clearing, staring after the riders. The nylon blouse, which she had tucked snugly into her brief white shorts, stretched without a wrinkle across her high breasts. The skin at her exposed throat looked vivid and white. She seemed a preposterously incongruous figure against the background of desert heat, sand, and flies. The dark, sour men on the camels probably hadn't believed their eyes, he thought; they must have decided she was some apparition, a tantalising foretaste of the blonde and gold houris which Allah had promised to provide for them in the gardens of death.

"I tried to stop them," she said.

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" If you couldn't, nobody could," he said wearily.

Ilse had given up the search for her bag, and returned to the plane. They decided to eat, and finished the remaining sandwiches before settling down for the night. Now their survival limit was cut down to a couple of days, three at the most.

In the morning, Beecher was wakened by Lynch.

" Please! I need something for the pain."

Beecher rolled over and got quickly to his feet. Ilse was sleeping amidships in a double seat, but there was no sign of Laura.

" Where is she? " he asked Lynch.

" Laura? " A smile brushed Lynch's ruined face. " She's gone, old man."

" Relax," Beecher said, as he prepared a syringe. " She's got nowhere to go. It's seventy miles to Goulimine. She wouldn't last an hour in the sun."

" She's not walking." The early morning light glowed like a gentle salve on Lynch's face. It created only an illusion of relief; Beecher saw the pain and hurt in his eyes. Lynch sighed weakly. " She made a deal with those bloody Arabs who came by yesterday. She slipped out to meet them a few hours ago. They're taking her to Goulimine."

" You're dreaming this," Beecher said. " She wasn't with them more than a moment or so. How could she make a deal? She didn't know their language."

" She speaks a basic language. You should know that. She got a message across to them. I knew something was up. But she begged me not to say anything."

Beecher sat back on his heels. He remembered how Laura had stood watching the Arabs ride off, slim legs spread wide, the nylon blouse spread tightly across her high, firm breasts. It was a basic language, all right.

They wouldn't take her to Goulimine, Beecher thought; they wouldn't accept her evaluation of her body. She thought in terms of one-night stands; but they thought of women as livestock. Something to be used until it was no longer productive . . .

It seemed to Beecher that Lynch had willed himself to die; with Laura gone, he had given up the struggle to live.

" Try hard to understand me," Beecher said. " If we get out of this, Ilse and I will be in trouble. There's nothing to prove we weren't involved in Don Willie's plans."

Lynch nodded weakly. " No good saying you had a gun against your head, unless you can prove it."

" I'm going to write a statement. I want you to sign it."

Lynch's eyelids fluttered. " I can't do it, you know."

" Why not? "

" She's still got a chance. Laura. She took all your money." He sighed.

" Listen to me, Lynch," Beecher said urgently. " You're dying, you know that. And although you cheated me—lied to get me into this, tried to burn me alive in that plane—I've done my best

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for you. But you're through. So don't start giving me a line about form and playing the game, because now your game's up. It's too late to start following the rules, Lynch. You're on your way out, and you're scared as hell."

Lynch drew a slow, cautious breath, and his eyes fixed themselves on Beecher's with a pathetic intensity. "Very hard to go out like that, I can promise you," he said faintly. "Listen. Laura's a peculiar girl. She's a liar. Not only when it's necessary."

He drew another tentative breath, like a man tapping the last few shillings from his bank account. "Remember, eh? She'd go to tea with friends, lie about it. Say she'd been shopping. Go shopping, tell me something else. No sense to it. The Land-Rover is—" Lynch's voice failed, and Beecher leaned forward and gripped his shoulder.

"The Land-Rover? What about it?"

"It's half a mile from here. Due south. The axle isn't broken Feed-line's clogged. Laura . . ."

Ten minutes later, Lynch died.

At eight o'clock Beecher set out to find the Land-Rover. It was parked behind a sloping ridge of black shale, and half buried under sand swept against it during the storm. He blew out the gas lines, cleaned the pump and carburettor, and got the engine running. Except for external fire damage, the truck was in good condition. There was a radio and compass on the dashboard, and in the back were luggage, coils of rope and chains, sleeping-bags, and entrenching tools. In a stout aluminium locker he found tinned foods and biscuits, and several bottles of gin and whisky.

Ilse was waiting for him in the mouth of the clearing.

They rested beside the pool and ate sandwiches of meat and dry biscuit. The sun was already hot, and the faint stir of wind over the water was pleasant. Beecher noticed how slowly and deliberately Ilse moved; in spite of the food she had nibbled, she seemed weak. She had piled her hair in a knot on top of her head, and her face was pale and expressionless as a wax mask.

"We've got a good chance to get to Goulimine," he said. "Then the trouble starts."

"What trouble?" Ilse asked him. "In Goulimine we can go to the police."

"It's a little late for going to the police. Or a little early, maybe." Beecher twisted round to face her. "Look. I took a job with Don Willie. That's a known fact. I had a row with Don Willie's French pilot, Maurice, who ended up murdered on my doorstep. Another known fact. I flew the plane down here."

Beecher sighed wearily. "You were Don Willie's—well, whatever you were isn't important. You knew what he was planning, but didn't go to the police. How do you imagine our stories will sound? We'll look like a pair of liars trying to pin the blame on dead men. Candles are burning now for those murdered pilots. Their wives have put on black for life. Somebody's going to pay

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for it. Can you think of better suspects than you and me?"

"We are going to Goulimine then," Ilse said.

"We're going to Goulimine," he said, "and then up through Morocco to Spain. At any rate, we'll try like hell. If we get caught on the way, we're through."

"Yes," she said slowly. "But what is the good of going to Spain?"

"Don Julio, the constable of Miramar, is a friend of mine. He won't call us liars until he can prove it."

Beecher checked fuel and oil, and refilled two of the jerry-cans with fresh water. Then he stripped and scrubbed himself in the pool, and shaved with Lynch's razor. He found clean slacks and shirts in Lynch's bag. The khaki shirt was a full size too large for him, but he left the collar open and turned the cuffs back under the sleeves of his linen jacket.

It was half past nine when they rolled from the clearing and swung with the compass towards Goulimine.

The Land-Rover had been hired from an agency in Casablanca, according to information on a brass plaque on the dashboard. There were addresses in French and Spanish, and, below these, a wriggle of Arabic symbols apparently repeating this message. But Beecher guessed that the truck would be recognised in Goulimine, that its comings and goings would be a matter of general gossip. When they reached the outpost late in the afternoon, he didn't drive to the central plaza, but parked half a mile from it, in an empty lane running between rows of one-storied, sand-coloured homes and shops.

Beecher changed his pesetas into Moroccan francs and bought tickets for Agadir, which was three hours from Goulimine. He and Ilse climbed into the bus. It was darker now, and the fires from cooking braziers leapt through the streams of people. The bus filled up rapidly. Everyone held something in his arms: a child, chicken, baskets of fruit and vegetables, bolts of cloth, suitcases tied up with rope.

They changed to the Casablanca bus in Agadir and, luckily, the connection was almost immediate. Within minutes, they were rolling north through the darkness. Beecher had an idea how they might get from Tangier to Spain without crossing a customs point. But the trip from Casablanca up to Tangier was what worried him; he had about enough money for a hotel room in Casablanca tonight. Beyond that, he had no plans, no hopes.

It was after midnight when they reached Casablanca. A misting rain was falling, and the pavement gleamed with yellow lights falling in cones from street lamps. He had decided to stay at El Mansour tonight.

It was a formidably busy and elegant hotel, the last place the police might be looking for him. He was mildly surprised at the devious twist of his thought. He couldn't register, of course; it would be foolhardy. But Ilse could. No one had known she was on the missing plane. No one would be looking for her. As

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they approached the red canopy protecting the entrance of the hotel, he told her what he wanted her to do, and then waited on the pavement while she entered the hotel alone.

A few minutes later, Beecher strolled in after her. He needed a shave, and he felt uncomfortably conspicuous in Lynch's khaki shirt. The doorman, a tall, black Arab in a blue-and-gold uniform, looked him over with round, surprised eyes. Fortunately, Beecher thought, a lot of the American construction workers in Morocco dressed as casually as beachcombers. Ilse was standing by the lifts, with a bellboy holding her single bag. Beecher drifted close to her. Without turning her head, she whispered her room number: 502. Then she moved forward with the waiting group to the lift.

Beecher decided not to follow her immediately. He bought the Paris edition of the *Herald Tribune* and drifted casually back to the lift.

Beecher shook out the paper and turned to page two. It was like snapping on a light while facing an unexpected mirror. His photo glared at him from the middle column. The caption read:

Murder Suspect Lost in Missing Plane

Beecher willed himself to stand perfectly still. He made himself take two deep, unhurried breaths. Then he looked at the dateline of the story and counted back on his fingers. They had left Miramar on Monday night. This was Thursday. They had spent forty-eight hours in the desert. The story was two days old then, starting with the discovery of the Frenchman's body at Beecher's villa on Monday morning.

His photograph had apparently been reproduced from a Spanish paper, for the printing was bad, blurring the distinctive outlines of his face. It was a snapshot that had been taken of him on the beach in the shade of the Casa Flore, a wineshop built against the cliffs below Miramar.

The story was sketchy, but basically accurate. They had his name and age right, and the details of his arguments with Maurice, and the fact that he had left Miramar on an aircraft, which—at the time of writing—was a dozen hours overdue at Rabat. The crew and passengers were listed parenthetically. (Captain Miguel Davoe, 29, pilot. Francisco Menoja, co-pilot, 28. James Lynch, 41. Laura Meadows, 26.)

At the end of the story, Don Julio, the constable of Miramar, was quoted. A murder had been committed, and an aircraft was missing, he said in substance, but he refused to speculate on whether there might be a connection between these two events. There was a significant omission in Don Julio's account, Beecher saw: he had chosen not to mention that the suspected murderer was also an experienced flyer.

Beecher tucked the paper quickly under his arm and stepped into the next available lift.

The room was quietly luxurious, with gold-and-ivory furniture gleaming in the light from slim white lamps. Everything seemed to shimmer in a gentle radiance.

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Ilse was having a shower. They had spoken very little during the day, and he knew that she was tense and irritable.

When she came out of the bathroom, he asked her to signal the hotel operator and book a call to Spain—to the Irishman's pub in Miramar. Personal to Mr. Donald O'Brien.

The connection would take at least half an hour. Ilse looked questioningly at Beecher.

"That's all right," he said.

"Thank you, I'll wait," Ilse said to the operator, and replaced the receiver.

Beecher picked up his cigarettes, but found that the packet was empty. He poked a finger round inside it, idly.

Ilse sat on the edge of the bed again, but stood almost immediately and began pacing restlessly, looking about the room as if she were seeing it for the first time.

"Look, how about going down and getting me some cigarettes?" Beecher said. In the heavy silence, with the telephone black and mute and indifferent, the twist of her sandals on the carpet had become a monotonous, maddening sound.

"Yes, of course," she said quickly, and he realised that she was glad to go.

When the door had closed after her, Beecher shaved and took a quick shower. He was putting on his shirt when the phone began to ring. The operator told him that the call to Spain was ready. There was an interval of crackling noises and distant Spanish voices.

Then, clear as a bell on a frosty morning, the Irishman came through. "Yes, hullo, hullo?"

Cautiously, Beecher raised his voice and said, "How's your stock of Irish whisky these days?"

Beecher couldn't risk using his name. Sometimes long-distance calls to and from Spain were censored; sometimes they weren't. But it would be too risky to assume that he was talking on a private line.

There was an instant of dead silence, and then he heard the Irishman gasp, "Good God, Mi—"

"Hold it," Beecher said. "Please."

"Yes, of course. Stupid."

"I've got to get to Spain."

"I see." There was a thread of caution in the Irishman's tone. "But I wonder if you've given a thought to the weather here. You might be uncomfortable."

"This isn't a pleasure trip. It's business."

"Let me see." There was a long silence. Then O'Brien said crisply, "At the Hotel Velasquez in Tangier you'll find an Arab guide who calls himself Pinky. Ask him to take you to see Rosy. I'll do what I can at this end."

"Rosy" was the *Rosaleen*, the Irishman's boat.

"Thanks," Beecher said. He wiped beads of sweat from his forehead.

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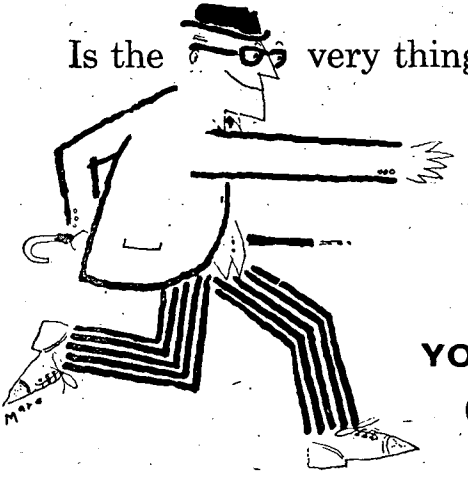

AFTER WORK
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"Unless you have an extremely strong line of goods, I'd suggest you forget about coming over," O'Brien said.

"I've got to try."

"Then God help you, my lad, and good luck." The connection broke with a click of finality.

Beecher sat on the edge of the bed and moistened his dry lips. He realised that Ilse had been gone more than half an hour.

There was a soft knock a few minutes later. Beecher opened the door and Ilse slipped past him into the room.

"Here," she said, and gave him two packets. "Are these all right?"

"What kept you?"

"I had to go out to a bar to get your cigarettes, and an American at the counter started talking—offered me a drink. I wouldn't have stayed but he told me he's driving to Tangier tomorrow; said he'd room in the car for me. Looked a bit disappointed when he heard I wasn't alone, but he's agreed to give us both a lift in the morning. We're in luck . . ."

In the morning their luck held. The American was as good as his word and took them both to Tangier. Eventually he dropped them in a sidestreet near the Velasquez and drove on.

They found Pinky at the Velasquez, a smiling, dreaming youngster in a red fez and a flowing blue djelabah. He seemed a slender support to Beecher; Pinky's eyes were mild and glassy, and he found his way from the hotel lobby to the street, trailing a finger tentatively along walls and over the backs of furniture. But he had got them to the Irishman's boat, and had promised Beecher he would hold the taxi until after they were at sea. He seemed to know his business, after all.

The *Rosaleen* was a tidy thirty-footer, with the pennant of the Tangier yacht club at her bow, and the colours of France streaming from a stern shaft. The brightwork was immaculate, mahogany and brass gleaming in the late sunlight. In addition to red and green running lights on her port and starboard sides, a large searchlight was mounted behind the yacht club pennant. The afternoon winds were cool, and whitecaps danced across the blue water.

The skipper of the *Rosaleen* was a small and volatile Spaniard, with thick, oily black hair, and the face of an anxious priest. He paced the cabin of the boat, his rope-soled sandals twisting dryly on the glossy floorboards, and looked at Beecher and Ilse with an expression blended of compassion and irritation and pity. "I explained to him that this would be a difficult matter," he said, shaking his head impatiently.

His name was Diego Najera, he told them, and he had been working with O'Brien for three years. He obviously admired him, but held a qualified opinion of his judgment. "This is not the time to be taking so much as one packet of contraband cigarettes into open water," Diego said. "Things are very tense. I explained

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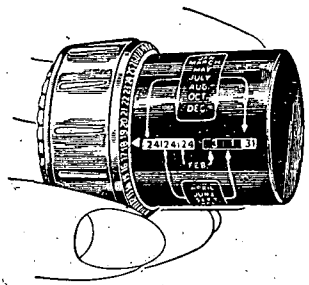

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this to him, and do you know what he told me?" Diego raised his hands and let them fall limply. "He says he trusts me. That is all. He trusts me. So what can I do?"

"I'm sorry," Beecher said. "I didn't think of the spot I'd be putting you in."

"It is all right. We will try our best. Now tell me: if we reach the coast of Spain, where do you want to land?"

"The Reina del Mar. Is it possible?"

"Possible, yes. But not too probable. But we shall see. We will try . . ."

The Reina del Mar was a chic and expensive restaurant near the village of Miramar. It had been designed as a beach club for the foreign colony, with a swimming-pool and orchestra, floodlit gardens, and a runway for skindiving and surf-riding boats.

Contrary to Diego's gloomy estimate, they reached its pier without incident four hours after the *Rosaleen* had skimmed through the Straits of Gibraltar.

Diego throttled down his engines and, with the loss of thrust, the *Rosaleen* began to dance and buck.

"Be ready now," Diego said.

The pier was dark and deserted, but above them they saw the dazzling lights of the beach club, and heard the music of a band drifting towards the water.

Diego docked with gentle precision, and Beecher stood up and jumped on to the pier. He caught Ilse about the waist and swung her over the side. Diego waved to them, his teeth flashing brilliantly, and then the *Rosaleen* curved smoothly away, her slender bow cresting the waves for home.

Beecher took Ilse's hand and started down the long dark pier to the shore. The club house of the Reina del Mar sprawled gracefully along rising ground a hundred yards above the beach. Light from open terraces flowed over the calm green surface of the swimming-pool, and glittered on the gravelled paths which twisted through fragrant groupings of oleander and geranium. The band was playing loudly, but occasional bursts of laughter and conversation came shooting through the music.

Beecher followed a shadowed path through the gardens, and hailed a cab at the entrance to the club.

"Now listen," he said to Ilse, as they swung down the winding road to Miramar. "There's a tiny bar called the Quita Pena on the road beside the railway track. It's a fishermen's hangout, very dark and very quiet. No one from Miramar goes there. I'll leave you on the terrace. It's not lighted. No one can see you. Drink a glass of wine and wait for me."

"Yes, Mike," she said, smiling at him. "But you must tell me what to think about while you are gone. I will be like a child without you."

"Well, just enjoy the wine and the moonlight and the fishermen's singing," Beecher said.

"No, I will wait until you come back before I enjoy anything."

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Beecher climbed the winding track that led to the villa. The moonlight was filtering through light grey fog, but he could see the massive bulk of the mountains against the sky, and slender trees twisting in the wind.

His villa loomed ahead of him, silent and dark; not a crack of light showed from window or door. He went round to the terrace and glanced down into the garden. The pale, gravelled walks and the tiny pool were shining in the moonlight. Turning, he saw that one of the terrace doors was open. The landlord must have padlocked every window, chained the garden furniture together, and then, smiling efficiently, hurried off leaving the terrace doors wide open.

Beecher walked into the living-room. A lamp with a tall, white shade stood beside the fireplace like some neat cylindrical ghost. Beecher was groping clumsily towards it when a switch clicked sharply; the overhead bulbs seemed to explode against his eyes, flooding the room with brilliant light.

Don Julio Cansana, the police constable of Miramar, stood in the terrace doorway, ominously correct and formal in his green twill uniform and shining black boots. The strong light gleamed on his silver-grey hair, and drew deep shadows beneath his cold blue eyes.

"I apologise for the touch of theatre," Don Julio said, "but I feared the lights might scare you away."

Beecher's mouth was dry, and his heart was still pounding with shock. It took him several seconds to absorb the implications of Don Julio's comment. "You were waiting for me?"

"Yes," Don Julio said. "The *Rosaleen* made excellent time, didn't she?"

Beecher sat down slowly on the arm of a chair. "Who told you I was on the *Rosaleen*?" he said hopelessly.

"Your friend, the Irishman." Don Julio strolled across the room, the heels of his boots sounding with measured clarity on the cold marble floor. "I persuaded him it was the wisest thing to do in the circumstances."

Beecher smiled bitterly. "And the circumstances were what?"

"I suspected you were in Morocco. For several reasons. A report of a Land-Rover abandoned in Goulimine. A hesitant description from a hotel porter in Casablanca. I was kept informed because the crimes had occurred here, you see." Don Julio's tone was mildly ironical. "The Frenchman was murdered twenty yards from where we are standing, and the missing aircraft was last heard from at our airport. Naturally, I have an interest in these things."

"Naturally."

"At any rate, the descriptions fitted you, and it was evident you were travelling north. It wasn't likely you would attempt to enter Spain legally, and this thought led me to the Irishman. He was reluctant and evasive until I made it clear I was in no mood for games."

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"Why didn't you arrest me when I landed?"

"You had gone to such great lengths *not* to be arrested that I believed—or hoped at least—that you were coming here to tell your story to me. Is that explanation correct?"

"Yes."

Don Julio's eyes were suddenly grave. "I will take your statement in my office. We are involved with a death, a murder, and several other matters. Your guilt or innocence, perhaps your life. Shall we go?"

The windows of Don Julio's office faced the small busy plaza in the centre of Miramar. The green blinds were drawn against the village scenes now, the traffic, the promenaders, and the clusters of people on the terrace of the Bar Central.

Don Julio's office was small and tidy, and contained a simple, uncluttered wooden desk, several straight-backed chairs, and two filing cabinets placed on either side of the window. A portrait of Generalissimo Francisco Franco hung behind Don Julio's desk.

Beecher had completed his statement; but Don Julio had made no comment on it as yet; he sat motionless behind his desk, in a thoughtful, distant mood. A third man was present, Don Julio's assistant, a gravely polite officer named Jorge Caldus, who wore a black suit and a black tie, and sat erectly in his chair.

The office was close and warm, but mildly fragrant with the aroma of coffee and tobacco smoke. The silence was oppressive; there was a strained quality to it, as if it might snap as suddenly and abruptly as a wire stretched beyond its breaking point.

Don Julio cleared his throat. "So that is your story," he said.

"That's it," Beecher said. "Everything."

"In that case, there are some things which puzzle me . . ." He hesitated, apparently searching for a word. "Well, let us say, if I am to accept this marvellous story, I must ask for a bit more clarification. Earlier, I phoned to Madrid, and reported that a survivor from the missing Iberia plane would be in my custody tonight. So, officials from our Intelligence staff and from the Guardia Civil are on their way to Miramar now. In an hour or so I will give them my opinion of your statement, and then, for practical purposes, the investigation will be out of my hands."

"Yes, of course," Beecher said. "What is it that puzzles you?"

"Let us begin, tritely but logically, at the beginning. The late Don Willie offered you a job in Rabat. You two were not friends. Considering this, didn't it occur to you that his offer was a bit strange?"

"Not particularly. He needed an American who spoke Spanish. I met those requirements."

"Very well. Next, you had two unpleasant encounters with the Frenchman, whose name was Maurice Camion. You have given me an explanation for his resentment of you, but at the time of the attacks you had no notion of why he disliked you. But you didn't ask him for any explanation?"

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Beecher hesitated; it was a small point surely. "No, I didn't," he said. "Maybe I should have been more curious about the Frenchman. But I wasn't. That's all there is to it."

"Is it?" Don Julio's smile was mildly sarcastic. "I'm relieved, in that case. Now we will take up the young woman from Canada, Laura Meadows, who, in the oldfashioned phrase, threw herself at your head. She was the factor which impelled you to decide to go to Rabat. You weren't sceptical of her near-infatuation with you?"

"I've told you the complete, literal truth," Beecher said. "Have you heard anything about her?"

Don Julio said quietly, "There has been no report of her from Interpol."

"Does that mean I'm lying?"

Don Julio shrugged. "No, of course not. But why did you agree to fly Don Willie's plane? Why didn't you say no?"

"Because they had a gun at my head."

"Was that the only reason?"

"No, I wanted to pay them back for what they'd done to me."

"Well, you haven't done badly," Don Julio said, smiling faintly. "You're alive, and the rest of them are dead. But it's this fact which makes your story difficult to prove. The Frenchman is dead, and the Iberian pilots are dead, and Lynch is dead. Everyone is dead. The list is long, isn't it?"

"You're forgetting Ilse."

"No, I am not. I wanted to hear your story first. Jorge, you will go to the Quita Pena and bring the young woman here. You know her?"

"Yes, Don Julio." Jorge came quickly to his feet, with an alertness that suggested a formal salute. When he had gone, Don Julio strolled to the windows and stood there with his back to Beecher. He pushed the blind aside and looked out into the street.

Then he turned away from the windows and sat on the corner of his desk, one booted foot swinging slowly and rhythmically. He regarded Beecher with a curious smile. "Let me ask you a question: supposing our roles were reversed in some miraculous fashion, what do you imagine you would think of this story which you've been telling me? What is one of the first things which might occur to you?"

"I don't know."

"Think a minute. If you had freely joined forces with Don Willie, if you were a partner in his scheme, can you imagine a more effective story than the one you have just told me?"

"You mean it would make a nice alibi?"

Beecher felt unpleasantly trapped; everywhere he turned stood the bars of the policeman's logic. "There's the plane," he said. "And Lynch's body."

"Yes, these things are true," Don Julio said, his manner that of a professor encouraging a student in logic. "I believe in the plane and the body. But these things would be just as true whether

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you were deceived by Don Willie or whether you were working freely with him for your own profit. The question is, can I believe in you?"

The door opened then and Jorge came hurrying to the office. "She isn't there," he said to Don Julio and his eyes were bright with excitement. "She is definitely not at the Quita Pena."

Beecher stood up slowly. "She's got to be there." He stared from Don Julio to Jorge. "What are you talking about? I left her there not more than half an hour ago."

"Come! There is no need to shout." Don Julio stood and walked to the windows. He pulled the blind down an inch or so, then released it; the blind shot up, snapping about the roller. "Please direct your attention to the terrace of the Bar Central," Don Julio said. "Do you wonder that I find your story incredible?"

Beecher looked through the misting rain. Cars and trucks rattled past, and an old woman was running heavily towards the doorway of a shop. Suddenly Beecher felt as if a huge hand had closed round his heart, squeezing life and breath from his body.

"Good God!" he said.

Don Willie was sitting alone at a table near the front of a terrace, a bottle of beer before him. He wore a black raincoat, with a yellow scarf knotted about his throat. As Beecher stared at him, still shaking his head helplessly, Don Willie collected his change and walked from the terrace, strolling without haste towards the little street which led down to his village.

Don Julio put a hand on Beecher's shoulder. "He hasn't left the village this week. This I know, Mike."

Beecher shook his head slowly; he felt as if he had been buffeted about by some grinning, powerful bully. "She lied to me," he said thickly. "He's not dead."

"Impeccable logic. If he's alive, it follows he is not dead."

"Take me to Don Willie. I'll sign any charges or accusations you want. But he'll collapse at the sight of me. He thinks I'm dead, don't you realise that?"

Don Julio smiled patiently. "And a moment ago you thought *he* was dead."

"I was told he was dead." Beecher tried desperately to make his thoughts run in a straight line. Until this instant, he had accepted Laura's story that Don Willie had died in the truck crash. And now he remembered Lynch's dying words: "She likes to lie. Not just out of necessity. Remember this. Gives her an advantage."

Lynch had known Don Willie was alive, and he had tried, obliquely and pathetically, to warn Beecher of that.

Don Julio cleared his throat. "You wish to confront Don Willie with these accusations then?"

"Yes."

"Very well. Let's go."

A dark-haired maid opened the wide carved door of The Black Dove, and Don Julio told her they wished to speak with Senor

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Willie. She nodded with a suggestion of nervous formality, and showed them into the living-room.

Don Willie snapped on the lights as he strode into the room. He wore a blue flannel smoking-jacket over baggy slacks and a sports shirt, and his little eyes were blinking in his flushed round face. "I was preparing for my bed, Don Julio, you must forgive—" His voice broke off there, and he halted as suddenly as if he had walked into a stone wall. He stared at Beecher with his mouth hanging open and his eyes bulging ludicrously behind the bifocal glasses.

Then an astonished and incredulous smile spread over his features. "Mike!" he cried happily. "How is this miracle? Everyone has been so sad for you. Is everybody all right? The plane didn't crash?"

Beecher tried to keep his straining nerves under control; Don Willie's composure was staggering. "You know what happened to the others," he said slowly.

"How is this?" Don Willie peered closer at Beecher. "I know nothing."

"You murdered them," Beecher said. "Has that slipped your mind?"

Don Julio bowed gracefully. "Mr. Beecher has made a number of serious charges against you, Senor Willie."

"Please explain this craziness," Don Willie said. "What do you mean, he is making charges?"

"Please." Don Julio raised his hand like a traffic policeman halting traffic. "The charges are as follows: that you forced Mr. Beecher aboard the Iberia aircraft which disappeared last week on its scheduled flight to Rabat; that you ordered the execution of its regular pilots; that, through an accomplice, you made him fly the plane into the desert south of Morocco, and that there, in the Sahara, you attempted to kill him. Would you like to comment?"

Don Willie puffed his cheeks out like an infuriated gobbler. "I make a comment, yes, of course," he said in a trembling voice, shrill with emotion. "I tell him to get out of my house."

"We don't know about the other passengers and the crew," Don Julio said, "but Mr. Beecher insists there is a witness to support his accusations."

"Bah! You think I am to be joked with like a child!" Don Willie drew himself to full height. "This person who wants to say something against me, where is he?"

"The person is Ilse Sherman."

"What is this? What can Ilse know of these things?"

"When we find her, we will ask her."

Don Willie raised his hands, then let them fall helplessly to his sides. "Are you crazy, too? You don't need bloodhounds and policemen to find the child. You walk down the hall and knock on the door of her room."

"Well?" Don Julio raised an eyebrow at Beecher. "You are mistaken again?"

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"No," Beecher said. "I want to speak to her."

Don Willie shook his finger at the policeman. "We will go to the bottom of this now. You don't take my word, eh?" He strode to the hall and cried, "Ilse! Please come here." Then he turned and hurried to the fireplace. "Here, here is her passport. I will show it to you." He took a slim book from the mantelpiece and thrust it angrily at Don Julio. "There! Examine it! See if she has left the country."

Don Julio shrugged. "I asked only if she had been here in the villa." He flipped open Ilse's passport.

Don Willie had made his first mistake, Beecher decided; he should have waited for Don Julio to ask him for the passport.

Don Julio flipped through it with mechanical skill, eyes narrowing as he examined the dates of entradas and salidas. "Yes, of course," he said. "She most certainly has not left Spain."

There was a light footstep in the hall and the three men turned their eyes alertly to the doorway as Ilse came into the room. She smiled politely at them as she turned to join Don Willie in front of the fireplace. She wore a brown tweed skirt and a yellow linen blouse, her dark hair was brushed cleanly away from her forehead and held at the back of her neck with a narrow red ribbon.

Beecher sighed wearily; he felt sick and dispirited, and saddened by the effort she was making to meet his eyes.

Don Julio glanced at Beecher. "Well, Mike?" He turned as he said this, and moved beyond the rim of light extended by the fireplace. He stood in shadow then, removed from the scene but in a position to watch the faces and expressions of everyone in the room; his cold blue eyes flicked from Beecher to Ilse as he put a cigarette in his mouth and drew his lighter from his pocket.

Beecher sighed again, and looked sadly at Ilse. He had known what was coming from the minute Don Willie strode so confidently into the room; Willie couldn't have brought off that bit of acting unless he had known that Beecher was alive. And only Ilse could have told him.

"Tell the truth, Ilse," he said.

"About what, Mike?"

"Please, Ilse," he said wearily. "This won't help."

"I—I don't know what you're talking about."

Don Willie held her close against his powerful body. "Of course you don't. And you are tired, I know."

"Last night you were happy, Ilse," Beecher said quietly. "Remember? You knew you were free."

She shook her head quickly. "I don't know why you are saying these things," she said, but her lips trembled as she spoke, and her eyes became dry and brilliant with pain.

Don Willie was watching her closely. "I don't see the use of all this," he said hoarsely to Don Julio.

Don Julio stood quietly in the shadows, smoking his cigarette. There was a thoughtful, musing expression on his face; he might have been listening to a distant strain of music. "I agree with

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you," he said mildly. He walked to Beecher's side and put a hand on his shoulder. "You will come with me to my office."

"What's going to happen to me?" Beecher said, without taking his eyes from Ilse's face.

"You will be held for murder."

"Then let's go," Beecher said. There was a chance that Ilse's and Don Willie's desperate lie might be difficult to disprove, he knew; her passport would be a strong prop for her story. There wasn't much to contradict it. His own word but not much else.

He stood for a moment watching Ilse. She tried to meet his eyes but couldn't; she turned away from him, her body stiff and rigid within Don Willie's arm.

"Please," she said, and her voice was like that of someone straining on a rack. "I—I must go."

"Yes!" Don Willie said sharply. "We have had enough of this."

She slipped from his arms, the firelight gleaming on her slim bare legs, and walked swiftly to the doorway, her head high and her hands clenched tightly at her sides.

Don Julio touched Beecher's arm. "Please?"

Beecher walked beside him to the door. The policeman moved with a confident step. He pulled open the door and bowed to Beecher. "If you please."

Beecher smiled. He swept an arm towards the door with a flourish. "After you, I insist," he said, and winked quickly at him.

Don Julio raised an eyebrow. Then he shrugged. "Very well."

Beecher turned in the doorway and looked back at Don Willie.

"I like things tidy," he said. "You used your B-26 to try to kill Laura and Lynch, didn't you? You sent them off with a handshake, I imagine, then took the plane up and banked round to knock them off the road. Am I right?"

Don Willie stood with his back to the fireplace. The colour was leaving his face, and his flesh seemed to be shrinking. "Get out," he said hoarsely. "You talk like a madman."

Beecher nodded thoughtfully. "I'm wondering how you'll do it. The revolver in the study is traditional, isn't it? Of course, a razor in a warm bath is efficient. You might think about it."

Don Willie raised his head until the muscles in his throat stood out painfully.

"I will not die," he said, and his voice sounded as if it might be ripping out the inside of his throat.

"Think of the honour of your house," Beecher said dryly. "It's a small price, surely. Good-bye, Don Willie."

Beecher and Don Julio walked silently past the sombre bulk of the little church, its twin steeples like horns against the sky, and turned at the railway crossing where the road climbed gradually up to the central plaza of the village.

They crossed the lighted but empty plaza a moment or so later, and entered Don Julio's warm office. Don Julio spoke quietly to Jorge, who nodded and hurried from the room. Then the policeman

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removed his stiff peaked cap and sat down behind his desk.

"Please," he said, and nodded to a chair.

"Thanks," Beecher said, but instead of sitting he turned to the window. Lighting a cigarette, he stared into the dark tunnel of the street.

"So?" Don Julio said at last.

Beecher shrugged. "So?"

Don Julio removed a sturdy watch from the inner pocket of his jacket and placed it before him on the desk. "Very well, then," he said. "We shall both wait."

Beecher was caught off balance. "What do you mean?"

Don Julio was smiling now, seemingly quite pleased with himself. "How much time do you intend to give her, Mike?"

Beecher shook his head helplessly. "You knew all along I was telling the truth?"

"No, far from it." Don Julio sighed. "I prayed it was the truth, but I wasn't certain. Don Willie's difficulties in Morocco have been official gossip within the Administration for some time. The loss of the pertinent documents would have delayed the accounting, but not for very long. I wanted to make sure your story could be proved."

"And you think it can?"

"Certainly. I have posted Jorge to The Black Dove to see that Don Willie doesn't leave Miramar tonight."

"What makes you so certain?"

"It was partly your manner at Don Willie's. You didn't behave like a man whose life hung on a lie. Then the girl came in." Don Julio smiled. "She is a pretty thing. And considering her emotional pressures, she did not lie badly."

"You knew she was lying?"

"Oh yes. You could have broken her to pieces with one more word. Why did you spare her?"

Beecher shrugged and turned back to the window. "She's got to do that herself."

"I understand now." Don Julio glanced at his watch. "But how much time can I allow for this experiment?"

"I don't know. What does the police manual say? How much leeway is allowed for a bid for freedom?"

"None at all, I'm afraid. The plane from Madrid will be here shortly. The officials from Iberia and the inspectors of the Guardia Civil will get the truth from her. And there is the end of it. Her chance will be gone."

Beecher suddenly gripped his arm and pulled him closer to the window. Someone was coming along the street which twisted up to the village from the sea. Through the darkness Beecher saw a small slight figure, the flash of a white raincoat.

He let out his breath slowly. "Can I go down to meet her?"

"Yes. I would like to hear her story alone, however."

Beecher opened the door and walked down the steps of Don Julio's office. The wind off the sea was cool and damp and salty,

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and the dark flowers in the middle of the plaza were swaying gently. Beecher straightened himself and walked across the square to meet her.

She was coming slowly up the street with her arms stiff and unmoving at her sides. There were drops of rain in her dark hair, but her face was wet with tears. She saw him stop for her, but would have walked past him if he hadn't caught her arm.

"I was waiting for you," he said.

She began to cry then. "I'm sorry," she said. "I'm sorry."

"Please. Never mind."

"I waited for you at the Quita Pena. I waited for you and I was so happy. Some fishermen had worked on one of Don Willie's boats in the afternoon. They were talking of him and I learnt that he was alive. I couldn't help myself. I flew to him—like—like a filing to a magnet."

"And he begged you to lie. He said the truth would destroy him. I know that. So does Don Julio. He's waiting for you."

Beecher put his arm about her shoulders and they walked across the bright empty square.

"I will destroy him," she said, whispering the words into the wind. "But it isn't good, it isn't a good thing."

"I'll be waiting. We'll need each other for a while."

"Yes, for a while," she said sadly.

"Who knows?" he said, and tightened his grip round her shoulders. "Now is what counts."

At the steps leading up to Don Julio's office, he kissed her gravely on the forehead. Don Julio opened the door of his office and bowed to Ilse. "Come in," he said.

She looked quickly and uncertainly at Beecher. "Please wait," she said. "Even a little while is all right."

When the door closed, Beecher put his hands in his pockets and strolled across the plaza towards the Bar Central. He discovered a five-peseta coin in his pocket, a duro. Just one duro.

He smiled at this. It seemed a fitting and happy omen. Just the price of a brandy.

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SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

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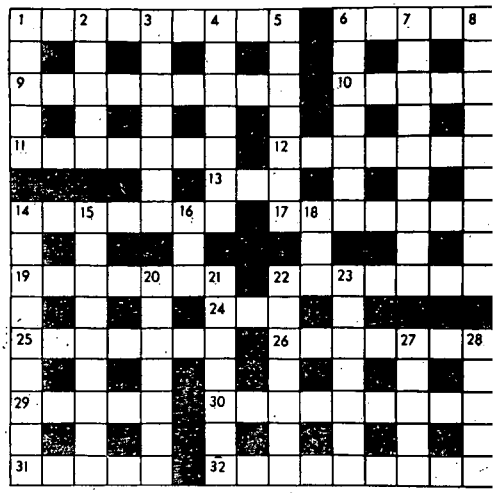
ARGOSY CROSSWORD

Solution on page 143



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